

Best heart rate zones for running



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by Joe Beer

Ever noticed your heart rate is usually higher when running than on the bike? You're definitely in the majority of athletes, says 220 coach Joe Beer...

It's very normal to have a higher heart rate (HR) when running compared to biking, despite feeling no greater effort. It's the muscles pushing the heart to pump faster due to more muscles being used when you run. Similarly, HR when riding a stationary bike or turbo trainer is less than on rollers or road riding because the latter two take more muscular effort to balance and steer.

Some athletes can have max HR and HR zones for cycling that are very close, sometimes identical, to their running HR. However, a quick check on athletes I train who have had both max tests done suggests that maximum HR tends to show a 5-10

beat higher number when running. This would mean the top of the endurance zone would be 7-8 beats higher for running compared to biking.

Personally, I'd rather athletes keep base training (zone one) anywhere from 60 to 80% of max HR, ideally the lower to mid range of this zone. Not 79-80% or, as I've seen quite incorrectly quoted, between 80-84%.

To find your HR Zones for running you have several choices:

- Do a max test on a bike in a lab or overseen by a coach – use this data to prescribe your HR zones for running. You may err on the side of caution but for many the one test, and one set of zones, is simpler and still very effective.
- Get a max test done in both disciplines. You'll then find the offset you have between the two sports. This can then prescribe zones set for each sport – but you'll also have to set your HR device to have these separate zones installed. If max test results are fairly similar (<3-5 beats difference) you could decide, in the future, to just test in one sport and use similar zones.
- Use nose breathing in bike and run sessions to get a gauge on what you can do cruising in zone one. These may or may not be different HRs. Then work out quality interval target zone (>86% HRmax) by doing a race such as a 5km run or a 10mile/12km bike time-trial as fast as you physically can muster from start to finish. Use this number as a guide to approximate 88-90% of maximum, or well into zone three.

Some people get hung up on a three-beat difference on a threshold test or a two-beat gain at max. They're missing the bigger picture: base is to keep below 80% of max (so you can nose breathe easily); zone three intervals and very short races are about 'full gas'. These are so different that after a while you should know whether you're in the zones, why and for how long.

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