



## The Joy of Running Hills by Suzanne Foster

Nothing brings me more joy during a run or race than seeing a huge hill ahead of me just waiting to be conquered. As someone who has run for 20 plus years, I was pleased to find out that running hills could actually make me faster and could also be considered a form of speed training (Why You Need Hills in Your Running Routine, Runner's World, May 2015). A hill workout can result in the same gains as a speed workout on a track: elevated heart rate translating into increased aerobic and anaerobic capacity, with less mechanical stress on the ligaments, tendons, and muscles (possibly leading to faster recovery).

The muscles that you use for running hills are the same muscles that you use for sprinting: glutes, quadriceps, hamstrings, gastroc/soleus complex. Hills increase your speed by building leg muscle strength which results in quickening and lengthening your stride further improving your speed, and all the while having a "protective effect" on your knees. See [Cool Running article](#).

Interesting to note, along with the fact that running hills will make you a stronger, faster and a more powerful runner, it has been shown that runners who incorporate hills into their routine are less likely to lose their fitness after taking a hiatus from running, and that hills can actually improve the elasticity of their muscles, ligaments and tendons. See [Runner's World article](#).

So next time you encounter a hill:

- 1) **LOOK UP:** Looking down can really compromise your form, breathing and alignment. Trust your feet to do their part.
- 2) **STAND TALL:** Try to be as upright as much as the slope allows. Bending at the waist can constrict airflow and cause lower back pain. Think of leading from the hips; this will help keep your head, shoulders, pelvis, feet in line and core engaged.

3) **FAST FEET!** Try to shorten your stride, LIGHT push off with toes.

4) **KNEES UP** (hard to do if you are too bent over at the waist!).

5) **ARM PUMP:** Pump your arms to give you power and keep momentum going up the hill.

6) **KEEP RUNNING!** Don't stop at the top! Keep running through the peak of the hill to keep momentum going. It will be harder to start up again if you do.

In a race situation, it is very important to remember that the goal is to keep EFFORT the SAME on the uphill and the downhill. This of course **does NOT equal the same PACE**. A good way to tell if you are working too hard on the hills is by using a heart rate monitor. It helps prevent you from burning out too soon and not having enough in the tank to get you to the finish line.

Lastly, power walk or run? The great debate; I have been in races in which I have been passed by people who are exceptional at power walking up hills. This is a great way to conserve energy especially in longer races where you really need it. Try both and figure out whatever works for you. Just remember the equal effort rule!

### Suzanne Foster

BA Psych, BScPT, CAFCI, CGIMS, MCPA  
Registered Physiotherapist MSP 46363  
216-2211 W 4th Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V6K 4S2  
Tel 604 730-9478  
Email [suzanne@w4pt.com](mailto:suzanne@w4pt.com)  
Web [www.west4thphysio.com](http://www.west4thphysio.com)

I also practice out of home in North Vancouver  
604 317-3378 [suzfoster.sf@gmail.com](mailto:suzfoster.sf@gmail.com)

WEST FOURTH

Physio

HOME

ABOUT

SERVICES

OUR TEAM

TESTIMONIALS

RESOURCES

BLOG

CONTACT

precise, personal and professional.  