The Ultimate APFT Run Improvement Guide:

How to Cut Minutes Without Adding Miles

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1:
Know What Score You Need and Want ............... 1

Chapter 2:
Build Up a Base Level of Endurance ............... 4

Chapter 3:
Optimize Your Running .......................... 6

Chapter 4:
Stay Motivated and Avoid Common Mistakes ...... 12

DISCLAIMER: Preparation for the APFT can be strenuous. You should consult a trained medical professional before you begin any strenuous exercise program, before making any changes in your diet and/or physical activity levels, and before adopting any of the information contained in this or other guides. This is especially true if you have or suspect that you may have heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, or any other medical conditions. If you feel faint or dizzy at any time while performing PT training, stop immediately and seek medical evaluation. The United States Government and any service member, civilian, or contractor employed by the United States Government disclaims any liability, personal or professional, resulting from the misapplication of any training procedure, technique, or guidance described in this guide. This guide is for informational purposes only, and does not constitute medical advice or guidance. It is also not meant to replace guidance provided by your physician or a trained medical professional or fitness instructor.

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Chapter 1: Know What Score You Need and Want
The Score You Need: APFT Two Mile Run Requirements

The following chart shows the minimum time requirements based on age and gender needed to pass the APFT 2-mile run. Keep in mind these are the times Soldiers need to score 60 – the minimum score to pass. To get the max score of 100, for example, 17- to 26-year-old male Soldiers need to finish in 13:00 minutes and females need to finish in 15:36 minutes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>2-Mile Run Minimum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 – 21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15:54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18:54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 – 26</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16:36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19:36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 – 31</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17:00</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20:30</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21:42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 – 41</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18:18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22:42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**For complete list of times and scores for all age groups, visit [APFTStandards](http://j.mp/APFTStandards). Note: the gray boxes on the website represent the minimum scores Soldiers must achieve for each age and gender group, and the yellow boxes represent the minimum score (50) needed to pass Basic Combat Training.
The Score You Want: Set a Personal Goal

The rules of the running test are: You’re not allowed to walk and you must score at least 60 points to pass. The faster you run, the better you score. Pretty straightforward. But many people make the mistake of aiming for the minimum, or never setting a goal time.

In order to stay motivated and perform on test day, you should start by setting a personal goal. This goal will help you select a training schedule and training techniques that work for you.

Make sure your goal time is realistic (you can use your age and gender as a guide), but never aim for the minimum. If you aim for the minimum, you may put yourself at risk for failing the test if you happen to be sick, injured, or “off” on APFT day.

Setting a Personal Goal

When you’re setting your goals, make them SMART.

**Specific:** What do you want to achieve? Don’t be vague.
   **Example:** Improve 2-mile run by one minute.

**Measurable:** Establish how you will measure your success.
   **Example:** The number of seconds you shave off of your 2-mile run time.

**Achievable:** Do you have everything you need to achieve your goal?
   **Example:** Time to dedicate to PT, clothes, shoes, etc.

**Realistic:** Make sure your goal is possible.
   **Example:** If you’re running two miles in 18 minutes, it probably isn’t realistic to set your goal time for 14 minutes at first.

**Timely:** Give yourself a deadline!
   **Example:** Hold yourself accountable with a deadline to achieve your goal that is before your APFT test date.
Chapter 2: Build Up Your Endurance

Before you start to trim time off of your 2-mile run, you will need to be able to run two miles without walking. If you’re not there yet, don’t sweat it. This section will help you build up your endurance.

If you are already a regular runner, skip to chapter 3 for tricks to optimize your running and trim your time. If you’re new to running or haven’t run in a while, here are some techniques to ease your way into running shape.
The Importance of a Solid Cardio/Aerobic Base

Build Endurance with the Walk-to-Run Method

A popular method for building running endurance is the walk-to-run method. Try the following workout to get started. Give yourself five to six weeks of easy training and take rest days to ease your body into the routine. Move to the next phase at your own pace as the workout starts to feel easy.

**Phase I:**
Start by doing “walk-run” intervals three to four times per week; walk for 90 seconds, then run for 30 seconds. Repeat 10 times for a total of 20 minutes. When that starts to feel easy, switch to walking for 30 seconds and running for 90 seconds. Cool down and stretch after each workout.

**Phase II:**
Jog three to four times a week for 20 to 25 minutes. If you need a break during the first few runs, slow to a brisk walk until you catch your breath. Cool down and stretch after each workout.

**Phase III:**
Run three to four times a week for 20 to 25 minutes. For one of the runs, do an interval workout: Warm up by jogging for 10 minutes. Once you’re warmed up, sprint for 60 seconds and jog for two minutes. Repeat the sprint and jog intervals two times. Cool down and stretch after each workout.

Once you complete Phase III, you should have a comfortable base to start shedding time off of your two-mile run without loading on miles.

Chapter 3: Optimize Your Running

Once you have a solid cardio/aerobic base, you can work on fine tuning your form, running techniques, and workout regimen to continue improving. This section provides ideas for how to trim your run time, without necessarily having to add more miles. Pick and choose what techniques work best for you to add into your normal running routine.

Reminder: You should never make drastic changes in your workouts (or diet) without first consulting a trained health or medical professional.
To get the most bang for your buck while training for the APFT, alternate high intensity and low intensity runs into your weekly routine. Mixing up your runs will build your speed and endurance much more efficiently than running at the same pace each time. Amp up your fitness by adding these two types of runs to your weekly workout routine:

**Short mileage, high intensity run (one to two miles).**
Set a goal time for your mile run and be sure to time yourself. Aim to run at a pace that cuts 30 to 60 seconds off your “comfortable” one-mile run. Remember that you will not be running this fast for a long distance – so push your body for speed.

**High mileage, low intensity run (four miles).**
This workout will improve your running endurance. Remember when setting your pace, this distance should be double the length of the APFT run. Getting comfortable with running a longer distance will make the APFT run feel that much shorter on test day.
Focus on Form

Taking time to perfect your running form from head to toe will save you time and energy, and spare your body from injuries as you train and during the APFT run.

**Head.** Keep your head up and eyes focused on the horizon (about 20 feet in front of you). Don’t look at the ground.

**Arms and Hands.** Keep your elbows bent at 90-degree-angles and swing your arms front to back, in rhythm with your legs. Your hands control the tension in your upper body. Hold your hands in an unclenched fist. Imagine you’re holding an egg in each hand without crushing them.

**Torso.** Keep your torso and back straight to open up your lungs. If you notice yourself starting to slouch, take a deep breath – it will make your body naturally straighten out. Running tall also keeps your hips in proper alignment and reduces pressure on your lower back.

**Legs and Feet.** Keep your stride short and your leg turnover (i.e. strides per minute) quick for the most efficient use of energy. For fast, shorter workouts, lift your knees slightly higher to increase leg power. However, don’t try to lift your knees high on distance runs or you’ll risk getting tired before you finish.

**Breathing.** Sync your breaths with your pace. Fitness trainers say that coordinating your steps with your breaths can improve form and reduce your risk of injury. Everyone is different, so it is important to use training to find what works for you. Some running experts suggest inhaling for three steps and exhaling for two (http://j.mp/breatheAPFTrun).
Run or Skip Uphill
Once a Week

Running uphill is one of the most effective ways to increase leg strength and aerobic capacity, which is your heart and lungs’ ability to get oxygen to your muscles.

You don’t want to overdo it and injure yourself, but adding an “uphill” workout into your training routine can be a great way to boost your running performance. Although there are many great uphill workouts to try, here is a sample for you to consider:

1. To start, walk or lightly jog on even ground for about 10 minutes.

2. End your warm up at the bottom of a steep hill that will take you about one minute to run.

3. On the way up the hill, measure your effort by your breathing – you should be able to just hear your breaths for this portion, but you shouldn’t be panting.

4. Pause for a couple seconds when you get to the top and prepare to run back down.

5. On the way downhill, stretch your legs wide with each stride, making sure to keep your feet light and behind your hips to minimize impact on your knees and back.

6. Repeat for 10 to 15 minutes.

7. Do a 10-minute jog to cool down.

Note: If you cannot find a hill or prefer indoor workouts, you can jack up the resistance and run on a steep incline on a treadmill instead. For the downhill portion of the workout, set incline to zero. The key is to run or skip uphill for at least 10-15 minutes, with short breaks/pauses in between each one-minute uphill dash.
When was the last time you let loose and ran as fast as you can? Probably not for a while. While we don’t recommend you try sprinting the entire two miles of the APFT run, we do recommend adding eight to 10 seconds of sprints to the end of your workout, just once a week, to noticeably improve your speed on APFT day.

In addition to making you a faster runner, adding high-intensity bursts to your workout is proven to increase your metabolism and help you burn more body fat.

Weight training uses constant changes in intensity, weight, repetitions, and movement to gain muscle mass and strength, which leads to increased speed and endurance in your runs. Squats, deadlifts, and planks all strengthen target areas needed to improve run speed. Check out some training demos for weight training exercises that are good for runners: squats (http://j.mp/1m6zDAR), flutter kicks (http://j.mp/1MZP4uA), floor presses (http://j.mp/1vH9wLx), lunges (http://j.mp/1m6zDAR), and planks (http://j.mp/1DiWtgl).
Cross Train

Cross training is a similar concept to weight training — it strengthens your aerobic system and boosts the effectiveness of your training faster than running alone. Cross training works by strengthening the supporting muscles needed on race day. Try swimming, using an elliptical machine, biking, or playing sports like basketball or flag football in place of one of your runs every other week.

Stretch

Stretching before and after your workouts increases flexibility, helps muscles recover faster, and increases your range of motion, which means you’ll be able to cover more ground in less time, and with less effort. Before your workout, consider doing this dynamic stretch routine (http://j.mp/1LT1KIC), which will increase range of motion and loosen up your muscles. Be sure to cool down after your workout with a 10-minute light jog or walk. While your muscles are still warm, try these static stretches (http://j.mp/PostRunStretch), but don’t push the stretch to a point where it becomes painful. The differences between dynamic stretching and static stretching is tricky. More information on when to do which stretches for optimal performance here: http://j.mp/APFTstretch.

Perfect 300 Tip

**Dynamic stretching**, best used to warm up muscles before a workout, involves moving while stretching. **Example:** Jumping jacks.

**Static stretching**, best used after a workout to relax the muscles, involves holding one stretch for more than 10 seconds. **Example:** Reach for your toes. Hold for 30-45 seconds.
Chapter 4: Stay Motivated and Avoid Common Mistakes
Easy Hacks to Boost Your Motivation

Getting started is the hardest part. Try these tips outsmart your mind and body to get moving:

- If you’re not feeling motivated to run or workout, just put on your running clothes. Often times getting suited up is half the battle.
- Get pumped for your workout by playing upbeat songs. If you like to train with music, pick songs that match your tempo (or beats per minute).
- Set your alarm 30 minutes earlier than usual and get in a mini-workout in the morning. You’ll feel great going into your day and minimize distractions that tend to pop up throughout the day. Check out these six perks to working out in the morning (http://j.mp/1uRIOz8).

Tips to Avoid Injury

Running injuries can set you back and significantly impact your running performance. Avoid getting sidelined with these tips:

- Wear the right shoes. If your shoes are worn out or don’t fit right, it can throw off everything else. Go to a running specialty store to get running shoes that fits your foot and distance goals.
- Gradually increase the length of your runs to avoid shin splints or other injuries. A good rule of thumb is to increase mileage by no more than 10 percent each week. Example; if you normally run three miles at a time, shoot for 3.3-mile runs for the next week.
- Give your body time to recover. Take a day off after a really tough run and make sure you are getting at least seven hours of sleep every night.
- Finally, check out these five tips to run smarter (http://j.mp/18w7BXP), and if you do get injured, follow these steps to help speed up recovery time (http://j.mp/SportInjuries).

Hydration Guidelines

When you are running frequently, you need much more water. Enter your weight, activity level, climate, and check the box for “strenuous exercise” in our hydration calculator (http://j.mp/hydrationcalc) to determine how much water you should be drinking daily.

Although everyone is different, here are some general guidelines for hydrating while training:

- Drink extra water and avoid caffeinated and alcoholic beverages while training.

- An hour before you start your run, try to drink about 16 ounces of water.

- Right before you start, drink another four to eight ounces of water.

- After your run sip water to slowly to replenish.

Should you drink water while you run? The answer is “it depends.” Experts suggest that you “drink to thirst.” If you aren’t actually thirsty, you may not need it. As a general rule, you should take in four to six ounces of fluid every 20 minutes during your runs. This means you may need to bring water on your runs during your long distance run days. But again, this is where experimentation is key.

Remember, to pass the APFT run test you need to build running endurance. The sooner you begin training, the better you’ll feel on test day. Set personal score goals, try out some new training techniques to increase speed, and treat your body well by hydrating and getting enough rest.