



## **How to Descend Trails**

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Surprisingly, running downhill on technical trails requires real talent and experience. Those who develop the requisite descending skills can make tremendous gains, saving time and stress on the body. The following steps and tips will help you improve your trail descending abilities so you can look forward to down hill running as a chance to coast and make easy time while enjoying the excitement.

1. Conserve energy and know that it takes less effort to run downhill quickly so you can finish your run more rested than those who are less skilled and use the wrong form on descents. Maintain a steady rhythm without sacrificing flexibility in your cadence, which you can adjust mid-step to leap a trail obstacle, take a stutter step to gain balance, or skip to avoid some bad footing. It is far better to jump over fallen trees, unsteady rocks, or other obstacles than to step on them.
2. Avoid the tendency to lean back in an effort to slow down, or to lean too far forward and over-stride. Keep your body weight centered over your knees with each foot striking on the ball rather than heel. This will give a slightly aggressive forward or downhill lean.
3. Think about your body positioning, balancing your torso evenly over your waist and lower body so that your posture alternates between leaning forward and running in an upright stance.
4. Maintain a relaxed pose with a levity of your arms and elbows up slightly, moving them higher when taking a sharp turn or maneuvering a steep drop. Use your arms to fine tune your balance, like a cat uses its tail.
5. Strike your foot in different places depending on the steepness of the decline. Your feet should be quiet. Those who thunder down the trail end up pounding their bodies cause themselves to suffer sore backs, quadriceps, and possible knee injury.
6. Practice. The more you work on improving your downhill running, the more comfortable you will be on descents, saving your legs for the flats and ascents.

7. Focus your vision well beyond your feet. Look ahead the way mountain bikers and skiers concentrate on where they will be rather than where they are at the moment. Keep the big picture in mind while you scan upcoming trail and terrain features rather than getting bogged down with placing each next step.

8. Employ many little steps to facilitate making minor adjustments to direction and controlling speed. Increasing the number of steps is an efficient way to control your descent pace and prevent joint and impact injuries. It is like putting a car in lower gear instead of riding brakes when driving a steep decline. By increasing foot turnover, you decrease the impulse to lean backward and attempt to brake by running on the heel of your feet. By refraining from heel braking, you will avoid overstressing your hamstrings and tendons.

Warning: Using this more aggressive style and posture translates to a faster descent. Be careful because the pace may be more rapid and challenging. Adjust your downhill running form a little at a time, especially if you are new to running quickly downhill or descending on trails with tricky footing. Consider starting by running down smooth, gradual hills before progressing to steep, technical descents.

For more information, go to: [www.trailrunner.com](http://www.trailrunner.com) and [www.runningtimes.com](http://www.runningtimes.com)