The 20-Minute Zone That Makes You Faster (Most Runners Skip It)

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[00:00:00] Okay, so zone 2 gets all the hype, right? But no one's really talking about the zone right above it. Just 20 minutes a week here, yes, that's it, gets you the biggest return on your investment, and you'll be running farther, faster, with less effort, and it's still aerobic. Let's talk about exactly what that is.

[00:00:18] So in this episode, I'm gonna be talking about what low zone 3 training is, what it looks like, the mistakes that runners make, how I avoided it for years, and I'll be showing you how I do a sub-threshold workout. Like, you get to actually watch me do that while I'm talking to you out in the field, and I'll give you a free training plan that allows you to do just that right now, today, or tomorrow, or next week.

[00:00:40] I'm Daren D. Lake. I've been running for about 30 years now, and I'm a certified coach. I've been coaching a whole lot of people over the last 10, 15 years, and I've been really experimenting with zone 3 and low zone 3 heart rate training, which is called sub-threshold. And it wasn't until I got a lactate threshold test done that I realized that my threshold was weak, and that I can improve it by doing efforts that are slightly below my threshold and do more of them.

[00:01:07] And we'll talk more about that. All right, on this run today, I'll be rocking the Saucony Endorphin Speeds. They're one of my favorite Speed 4s. Definitely my

favorite shoe right now. I bought so many of them. They're lovely for tempo runs. Lovely, especially on the grass here. But let's get into the first issue, which is the mistake that runners make.

[00:01:25] So a lot of runners, they make this mistake and they skip it. They either do a lot of zone two training, that was me, or they do, uh, a lot of high zone three or zone four training, and this zone, it's really, really tight. And some people might've called it the gray zone. A lot of runners, they miss it. They just don't know about it, and there's so much benefits that you can get from it when you focus on it, and you gotta be precise.

[00:01:46] I'll talk about the precision and exactly what you have to do very, very, very shortly. So here's why low zone three training matters, and this is what the Norwegians are doing when it's a double threshold session. So you might've heard of Jakob Ingebrigtsen, the triathletes, some marathoners coming out of there.

[00:02:00] They're doing a lot of these Norwegian double and single sessions. It's a certain percentage of your max heart rate, and I won't get into exactly where that is, because it does differ for some people. But it's anywhere between about 80 to 85-ish. Sometimes it's 87% of your max heart rate. You gotta know your max heart rate.

[00:02:18] A lot of runners don't know their true max heart rate. But another way to know whether you're in this exact sub-threshold zone is by doing a lactate threshold test, and you need to actually do the finger prick, and you'll get the blood sample taken out, how much lactate's in there, and you're around 2.4 millimoles.

[00:02:34] So somewhere, some people are 2.2, some people are 2.4 millimoles of lactate in your blood. So you wanna have that exact amount, and that's how you can train this to perfection. Or you can do power. So if you've done a couple of lactate threshold tests, which I like a lot because I can transfer that over to the treadmill and on hilly runs if I need to.

[00:02:54] Uh, or you can do pace, which is my least favorite, um, because pace can change, and when you're chasing pace, you actually can mess this up. Exactly where I want to be.

[00:03:11] Exactly where I want to be in that range. For me, 158 to about 162. And another way to know you're in the zone is by using pace, which I don't like for a lot of reasons, because mainly if you chase pace, your heart rate will creep, which goes to the last point of the mistake, is that you're not actually chasing a, a heart rate.

[00:03:32] You want to actually keep your heart rate exactly where it is, and if you have to slow down or your power has to go down because your heart rate goes up,

most people don't have the ability to finger prick themselves like a lot of professional athletes do, then you just need to slow down, and that's actually the point of it, and I'll talk about exactly how to do that, and that's the precision that we need to train in sub-threshold.

[00:03:51] So when your heart rate actually goes higher than what we want in sub-threshold, you enter threshold or proper zone three, high zone three, even zone four. You're not getting the benefits of this workout. While you will get fit, that does come at a limitation, and you will end up most likely over-training, possibly getting injured, burning yourself out.

[00:04:08] We don't need that. But yeah, let's get into how to actually do this, and to actually do that, I've got something for you. Okay, so a quick fix is that you can get the training plan that I have, which is about an eight-week sub-threshold training plan. So it's free, and you can get that right at the QR code here or link below.

[00:04:25] But in that, I show you exactly how to do sub-threshold workouts. I'll walk you through the exact programming, get you to do VO2 max workout, aerobics, uh, stuff around it, strength stuff, um, plyos. I have that all incorporated in there so you know how to actually do them all, but this is the actual way to do it, a bit of a sneak peek of the training plan.

[00:04:42] You need a flat course, and you have to have a heart rate strap or a heart rate r- uh, wristband, armband. Please do not just rely on your watch for a lot of reasons. The watch is inaccurate. Even the new Apple Watches, the new high-end optical HR, they just... The, the blood flow's too low, and it bounces around.

[00:05:00] I don't trust them. Get a strap. They're 30 USD. Um, the nice ones are probably 80, 100. Get one. Try to do it on a cool day if you can, so no hotter than 23 to 25 degrees Celsius. That's about 75 to 80 degrees. If you can, early in the morning's best to do these sessions because, again, your heart rate will creep if it's hot outside, humidity.

[00:05:21] Uh, try not to do it on a windy day. Windy's okay because we're basing on heart rate, but you still want to get up to speed. The, the velocity of how fast you're going still matters with these sub-threshold workouts, and try not to do it on a hilly course. So yes, you do need to have a bit of perfect conditions.

[00:05:36] You can also do this on a treadmill. Um, this is actually a great place to do it. Treadmills are kind of boring. I like it for treadmills, but it's summer here, so I'm gonna do it outside. It's a nice day. Maybe on rainy days, uh, colder days, I end up doing it there. But make sure you do it basically on a loop.

[00:05:51] A loop is perfect, 500 meter or one kilometer, one mile loop to where you either... You know, even out and backs are okay. Uh, you're just doing a quick turnaround. You can do the Japanese turnaround, which I love doing now. Um, so yeah, make sure that you're not going on undulating hills because that can spike your heart rate.

[00:06:07] You want to make sure everything's precise. We're in a lab with this, just like the Maffetone test All right, so a trap to avoid is going on pace and letting your ego get involved. When you first start this out, first couple weeks, you're gonna have to slow down five, 10 minutes in. 15 minutes in you're gonna have to keep slowing down.

[00:06:26] And then after three or four weeks You'll be able to not slow down as early. And then four to six weeks, six to eight weeks, you can go later and later until you're doing 20, 25 minutes at the same heart rate and possibly the same pace. Uh, you'll still have to slow down, though, 'cause that's normal, 'cause your heart rate will creep.

[00:06:46] Cardiac drift is a thing, especially on this workout. So you need to have discipline and restraint. It is very critical, 'cause if you go higher than where we wanna be at, sub-threshold, it turns to a threshold run, which there are benefits, but that's a specific run for a specific day, and we need to keep them separate.

[00:07:05] So I like to do a total of about anywhere 15 to 25, 30 minutes of work. When I'm starting out, I'll do about 10 to 15, and I'll break that into intervals. So I'll do three by six minutes or something, three by five minutes, and then I slowly make it, you know, two by 10 minutes, and then I'll make one by 20 minutes, and then go up to 25 and then 30 minutes total.

[00:07:24] There's a lot of other ways you can break it down, but that's the easiest way. And if I do intervals, I'll do a really slow jog for about one minute to 90 seconds in between, and then I just go right back into it. So it's kind of like intervals, but they're not as fast, and they're a bit more controlled, and the rest is much shorter.

[00:07:41] And it is absolutely fine to slow down as you get into it, five, 10 minutes into it, because your heart rate is starting to creep up. That's the point. What will happen is, you start doing this week on week. By week six, week eight, your heart rate won't be climbing as much, and the pace will actually stay the same, so you'll actually be able to maintain it.

[00:07:58] And that's how you know that your lactate is being reused as fuel very efficiently and economically. We can even say economically with this. We're getting really into the exercise physiology here. The lactate comes in, again, gets recycled

back in, used as f- fuel, glycogen, and then you're actually, like, kind of turbocharging your whole system there.

[00:08:16] And if you can sit there, and you start getting faster and faster at this pace, this is amazing for some 5K runners, 10K, definitely half-marathon. Even marathon people can benefit from this. I know 1,500 meter people do this, so they get benefits from it. There's so many benefits of this. It's kind of like a 6 to 7 out of 10.

[00:08:32] So, so good. Highly recommend it for so many people. If you have a high zone two, a very efficient zone two, you develop it, this workout complements that. But if you don't have a high zone two, this workout will be hard to keep a sub-threshold zone. If you have a low base or a weak base, this will still help.

[00:08:52] I highly recommend building up your base, 'cause all of the systems, they really, really need to be worked. So your VO2 max system needs to be worked. Your anaerobic. You wanna do strides and plyometrics and strength. All that needs to come together. And again, I stress precision, and the dose is the poison.

[00:09:06] Once you get about six to eight weeks in, you don't wanna do more than 25, 30 minutes total of work. Definitely start at 10 minutes if you don't have any base or you've never done this before. Highly recommend doing four to six weeks of base training, zone one, zone two, a lot of that, and making sure that your body's ready for this.

[00:09:21] Because it is kinda fast. Like, you'll find if you're going flat on a nice day, that you can move kinda fast. This is also gray zone. Some people call this the gray zone Zone, which I've done an episode on. But, um, it can be used poorly, and it can be used for good. Or a knife in the kitchen, you can cut up food for people and feed them, or you could hurt someone with a knife, and we don't wanna do that.

[00:09:42] So while I've been running for 30 years, I've actually only been doing this type of workout for the last two or three, and this is the year that I'm actually gonna incorporate it the most, 'cause I know it will help me a lot with 5K running, especially 'cause my threshold is so weak. It's the week four of my 18-week-long period.

[00:09:57] I'm trying to run a 17-minute 5K again, sub-17-minute 5K. And I'm just, like, trying to do it smart. No crazy long runs, just a lot of very specific, precise speed work. Let's see what happens with it all. Thanks for rocking with me. Thanks for coming on this workout with me. I'm always down to show you the training that I do and actually explain how I do it, give you free training plans, and also do it myself, show you the research that I'm doing, science behind it all.

[00:10:22] If you haven't already, go and get that free training plan, which is right here at the QR code or below in the show notes or episode description. And you'll automatically get signed up for my email course, which helps runners stay injury-free, helps self-coach themselves. It's a lot about the mental stuff.

[00:10:37] And it is six lessons in 18 days delivered right to your email inbox. You don't gotta go anywhere. Again, for free. And if you wanna learn more about lactate and lactate threshold training, I've done a whole masterclass on that. It's 30 minutes. Basically, just everything you need to know from beginning to end, and you can get that right below if you're on YouTube, right here, or at the show notes or episode description if you're on other platforms listening or watching.

[00:11:03] Happy runnings.