

The Next Step.....
Preparing and Running with a pack!
By Jen Segger (www.challengebychoice.ca)

Far too often this important element of stage racing is overlooked in one's training and pushed to the last few weeks of preparation when the athlete starts to stress about what equipment to use, what to pack and "OMG, how will I run with all that weight on!" Let's ease the mind and address it now.

The G2G is now three and half months away. For people that have never ran with a weighted pack on and yes, I am referring to more than just a standard hydration system used for a 2-4hr run, then we need to allow the body adequate time to get comfortable with the added weight.

Naturally, your pack is going to weigh the most on day #1 and will decrease day by day. You can look forward to day #6 when you no longer even feel the weight on your back. Following are my recommendations for pack running and being able to be confident in your abilities to run with it on come race day:

A pack that fits, a pack that works!

There are many packs on the market to choose from but finding one that fits your body shape and feels good is most important. The pack you run with should not bounce around. In hot climates, this is a sure way to get nasty chafing mid back and will likely lead to infection as the days progress. . The pack should fit like a glove without restricting you in the chest and without moving up and down or side to side. Ideally you want a fabric that is durable, lightweight and breathable. I suggest a set up that has adequate pockets and holders and can easily accommodate your hydrating system of choice. While some people like to use water bladders with a hose, I personally prefer 2 x 750ml bottles strapped to the front of my pack. My pack of choice is the Salomon XA 25 Wing Pack or the Salomon XA 20 pack with an added front pack. You will need to take the time to determine if all the required gear fits inside the pack and/or can be securely fastened to the outside (i.e. – sleeping pad). Look for items that are lightweight and compactible. Most importantly, be sure to use the pack that you are going to race with in training! Ensure that you have easy access to your food and that all items needed during the day's run are readily accessible.

Strength & Core Training

Being on a progressive functional strength training program is the key to developing a strong foundation that can support the weight of a pack for back to back days. You want to be able to run with good form and posture each day and reduce the risk or potential of injury. Remember that core training is not about doing 100 crunches a day. Focus on developing all the deep internal muscles that stabilize the trunk including the glutes, pelvic region, abdominals and muscles surrounding the upper

and lower spine. A strong back is the key to keeping your trapezius muscles relaxed and not aggravated. Squats and lunges should be incorporated in various forms and I suggest a mix of heavy lifting as well as plyometric movements. Seek the advice and expertise of a local, reputable coach if you are unsure on how to strength train correctly and for performance. Remember, we strength train to repair and build us up for the demands of the outdoor environment. This is a key component to your preparation.

Incorporating “Pack Running”

I suggest starting with 1 run a week in which you wear your weighted pack. This can be one of your weekly run/walk/hikes as a good starting point. It doesn't mean that you need to head out for your 5hr long run with a 25lbs pack on right away. Start with a one to two hour run and gradually add both time and weight each week. If you progressively allow your body to adapt, three months down the road, the your backpack will just feel like an extension of your body. As you run, focus on your stride. Consider shortening it, ensuring that your feet are contacting the ground below your hips as opposed to striking out in front. You will likely find that a high cadence turnover is the most efficient. Keep the shoulders rolled back down, lengthen the spine and avoid “hunched over running.” If you plan to run/race with poles, this is a great time to incorporate those into your training as well.

ONWARDS we go folks, step by step, you will be ready!