

THOMAS DOLD

# STEP UP!

THE ULTIMATE  
STAIR RUNNING  
TRAINING BOOK



Includes a 12-week  
training plan!

TECHNIQUE • TRAINING • MOTIVATION

Step Up!

The content of this book was carefully researched. However, readers should always consult a qualified medical specialist for individual advice before adopting a new exercise plan. This book should not be used as an alternative to seeking specialist medical advice.

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### **Step Up**

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome! I'm glad that you are here and that we have the chance to step up together. There are many ways to do this and stairs are one of the most common and easiest ways to get to the top.

Whether in the department store, at home, or on the winner's podium, stairs are everywhere. Have you ever wondered how to make use of this constantly available fitness tool? This book is for you if you're interested in any of the following:

- + Stair running as a competitive sport for real achievers
- + Stair training as complementary training for other sports
- + Stair running as a way to increase your fitness in general

If none of these catch your eye or if you would prefer to be on the couch, you will still be interested in the entertaining stories from the tower-running circus and the chapter on focus and mental training.

## About the Author

After a 20-year career in competitive sports, including 45 international stair running victories—seven in a row at the Empire State Building Run Up—and world records and world championship titles in backward running, a list of my accomplishments would take up several pages. If you would like to see the individual races and world records, they can be found at [www.erfolge.thomasdold.com](http://www.erfolge.thomasdold.com).



*Crossing the finish line on the helipad at the China World Summit Wing in Beijing. Winning the Empire State Building Run Up.*

*I started playing soccer when I was seven years old, but transitioned first to running at the age of 17 and, a short time later, to mountain running. Winning the bronze medal for Germany with the junior team at the 2002 World Mountain Running Championships was the first important highlight of my running career.*

*In 2003 I began my stair-running career at the Donauturm in Vienna. It took two years of intensive training and many stair-running sessions before I was fit enough to win tower runs, but ever since then I have traveled to taller and taller buildings around the world (in whose emergency staircases competitions are held). In addition to my sporting successes—the world records, the world championship titles, the trophies—these experiences and people I have met along the way have shaped my personality.*

*Over the years, not only has the world changed, so, too, have stair running and, particularly, myself. My personal journey has taken me from a young, inexperienced athlete hungry for success to one with more to offer than the mindset of a serial winner who achieves every goal with iron discipline and steely will.*

*It is possible to take a relaxed approach to physical and mental training and exercises. Top performance without gritted teeth has many advantages!*

I love hearing from people—often after I have been a guest on a talk show—who say that now they take the stairs much more often and are having fun doing it. You're alone on the winner's podium, but moving forward together is a different kind of reward. Who are you willing to have fun with on the stairs, sweating after flights and flights of exercises?

## How the Book Is Structured

Anyone can walk or run up stairs. But at train stations and airports, you quickly notice who is confident on the stairs and using the handrail and who is untrained.

To get you started, we look at the positive effects of taking and running stairs. In the following section, you get an overview of the topic of stair running. After that we will start with the basic elements like step technique, use of handrails, and so on in more detail. Explanations on using training areas and training methods will ensure a healthy and long-term ascent.

Once you have sufficient basics and tips for your training strategy, you will learn practical exercises for different fitness levels. In addition to stair running for beginners and advanced athletes, chapter 9 provides many ideas and inspiration for trainers and athletes from other sports who want to improve their training.

Each exercise has been rated on a scale of one to three stars with three stars representing the most challenging exercises.

Coordination and strengthening exercises on the stairs can be challenging. But the goal is not to inspire the next world champion tower runner. That is why the 12-week training plans are designed for beginners, amateurs, and ambitious runners. In addition, there are tips and tricks on special equipment and national and international competitions.

Mental preparation and resilience are key to stair running and therefore an entire chapter has been dedicated to these topics (see chapter 19).

# 1

## WARM-UP

For many people, the thought of running up a skyscraper at a sprint pace may seem intimidating. It's a feeling I can't dismiss out of hand; even after 45 tower running victories on five continents, the thought is true, the impression is real.

### 1.1 Why Stair Running?

- Why do thousands of people of all fitness levels still take the exhausting way up to the observation platforms of these prestigious buildings? Why do they insist on going on foot when high-tech elevators are waiting nearby?

This question about the WHY is clarified in this book as well as the question about the HOW. This will give you a sense of how taking more steps in your life can lead you to rise higher. You'll recognize the opportunities that the oft-avoided fitness devices give you everywhere—in cities in high-rise buildings and as a natural staircase in vineyards and hillsides in rural areas.



## 1.2 Perspective and Approach

This is the second focus of the book. Stair running challenges the body—if you want it to. However, there are valid reasons why stair running is often not included in training by many runners, endurance athletes, and athletes in general. The reasons lie in the approach, and that is the second point to which the book is dedicated.

There are objective and subjective reasons why someone takes the elevator or the stairs, why someone wins competitions and why someone else comes in second. Rarely are the physical reasons the real cause. The stairs of this world therefore offer not only the possibilities to strengthen the body, but also, for those who wish, to train the mind. Chapter 19 will discuss how to use this mental training in your everyday life.



## 1.3 After Each Stair Run Comes the Descent

Wherever you are in the world, no stair climber has ever remained on the observation platform; for all of them, the ascent is followed by the descent. This metaphor describes life. It is a constant alternation between two polarities—tension and relaxation, ascent and descent, health and sickness, and the most extreme contrast between life and death. Nothing remains, not even physical performance; everything is subject to a constant rising and passing away.

These experiences and this mindset flow into this book as well as my experiences as a trainer of beginner, amateur, and internationally successful professional athletes who compete in the Olympic Games.

I know from painful experience: no trophy, no victory, and no goal achieved can really make you happy. The relief behind the finish line, the recognition, and attention are wonderful. But that is not happiness, it is like salt water when you are thirsty. Being happy takes place within you, in silence and stillness. With all the variety of experiences and knowledge, the focus of this book—the exercises and knowledge transfer—is on you. YOU should have fun while reading and especially during practicing and through this achieving your goals. In this sense, there is a short warm-up and then we'll start with the core content. If you are very impatient, you can start directly with the practical exercises; you can always read the theory and tips on technique and training later.

# 2

## WHY RUNNING STAIRS?

Usually you ask yourself the question of WHY at the very beginning.

- Why you have picked up this book and why are you are interested in exploring stair running?

Wherever this interest comes from, the main thing is that it leads to action and to trying it out in practice. If in the last days, weeks, months, and years you have not yet broken a sweat by running and climbing stairs, and your running shirt is still fresh and clean in your closet, this chapter will help you recognize the benefits of stair running.

If you have absolutely no intrinsic motivation for stair running, you can read as much as you want about the benefits; at any given moment, you will come up with a thousand excuses why climbing stairs is not for you right now. I have experienced this for 20 years and I know all the excuses people make for themselves, me, and others.

But you seem to have a flame of interest and motivation in you and we will keep it fueled with objective arguments until the stair running fire is big enough to fuel you.

## 2.1 Fun Factor and Attractiveness

- Many of my seminar participants wonder:
- How can running stairs be fun?
- Aren't the stairwells musty and dark?
- Isn't the climb exhausting?

That's exactly the thrill, the motivation. If you're really hungry, you look forward to eating. A warm sunbath seems especially beautiful in dreary, dark, rainy weather in February. The power and sensations you feel as you run up the stairwell and finally reach the top cannot be described in words. The hormone cocktail that the body gives you as a reward is particularly long-lasting, usually for hours or even the whole day. The investment for this is the devotion to the stairs.

Those who are more committed to pushing the physical and mental boundaries will be exuberantly rewarded. This reward consists of an expanded physical and mental freedom. On the one hand, through the physical adjustment after supercompensation and on the other, through a new awareness of what you can handle.

How strong these effects and feelings are is up to you. It is true: Everything becomes simultaneously more intense; a momentum develops that every athlete knows. Often unconsciously the body and mind want to experience this feeling again; this turns on the staircase magnet and sets this (positive) devil's cycle in motion. You now know that after overcoming the initial resistance, your stair running will take off. Let's go.

## 2.2 Challenge Yourself

For all competitors who love accuracy, comparability, and measurability, stair running is the Mecca. In the stairwells of the world, there is no wind and no bad weather—at least for indoor stair running. Outdoors, in the vineyards, for example, things are different, of course.

Because the external parameters are very constant, you can measure up—with others or, and this is a special mental challenge, with yourself. Look at and train with the stopwatch on your arm, the hammering pulse in your throat, the limits of what is possible with your body. You can compare a workout from last year, last month, or last week with your current workout, and you'll know immediately how well you're doing right now. With the exception of you and your performance, everything in the stairwell stays pretty constant.

This is not everyone's cup of tea and some people break out in a sweat just reading about it. But always remember: In each of us there is a winner and the challenge gene. We see it in small children, but in many adults it has faded so much that it has become invisible. However, this gene is built into each body and can be awakened.

If you feel it right now, put the book aside and go for a run. The book can wait; your thighs, your calves, and your anticipation of the steps want to experience the feeling.

## 2.3 Variety

Stability and variety need a suitable ratio. Experiencing the same food and drink every day is rarely a desirable goal. That is why effective training consists of basic training and sessions that alternate over and over again. Here, stairs can be a special splash of color in the training gray. Especially in winter, when the weather outside makes intensive sessions difficult, it is often shorts weather in the stairwell. The diversity of each staircase also creates variety. Whether it's the handrail on the left or right, the height and depth of the steps, the overall ascent, and of course whether the staircase turns clockwise or counterclockwise.



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“Climbing stairs has gone from a chore to a joyful challenge, and my thoughts wander to you ... It was nice hearing from you!”

*–Feedback from a participant after a stair-running seminar*

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These are just a few of the obvious parameters that add variety to running stairs. Add to this your own physical shape, because with a higher level of fitness you will experience a completely different running sensation in the same staircase. Fighting against each step becomes like flying on an inclined plane towards the sky. This will certainly take a few thousand steps of training, but at least for a few floors almost everyone can feel this feeling of lightness and of flying towards the sky.

## 2.4 Training Stimuli

***“I run six times a week and I’m not getting any better!”***

*—Quote from a running seminar participant*

In conversation, she explained that every morning, except Sunday, she and her friend jog the same loop, chatting or just running quietly next to each other. It usually takes them the same amount of time to complete the loop. If you don’t put your body out of balance (homeostasis), you won’t feel any adaptation. The physical performance increase can only happen if you move outside of the performance range you have been used to. Then the complex process of increasing the load tolerance will be set in motion and sooner or later you will notice more power and more endurance!

Stair running is a very intensive load, which is almost always outside the normal load balance. Therefore there are some important aspects to consider so that you do not strain your body. Stair running is excellent for friends of high-intensity interval training (HIIT).

## 2.5 Mental Training

Many tower runs take place in staircases without windows and the entertainment of nature or spectators. This challenges your mental strength, because you will only be motivated from within for the next step. Due to the high load and effort, mental training is of particular importance. That’s why there is a separate chapter that also covers the topics of focus, goals, and setbacks.

## 2.6 Constant Training Conditions

Many stairs are reserved exclusively for you. Whether in high-rise buildings or in nature, on the stairs you have a high chance to train undisturbed. No soccer team accidentally shoots balls at you, no trucks cross your path, and no cyclists overtake you. On the stairs you can do your training. This creates constant training conditions.

## 2.7 Extraordinary Competitions

For my stair-running colleague Matthias Jahn, with whom I competed for many years in the worldwide competitions, that was the spark that lit the fire. When I told him I was running up the world's tallest building in Taiwan, a switch flipped in him. From then on, he, and at times we together, trained for the stair races in the metropolises.

Doing sports in the centers of the world's cities is a unique selling point. The view after the race is indescribable. Of course, not everyone who reads the book will be in New York to run up the Empire State Building, but perhaps the Millennium Tower in Vienna or the Swissotel in Singapore is worth a trip?

Maybe this is how your journey starts, into a whole new world—that of staircases, mega-cities, high performance, and training optimization.



*Tower run in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam at the Bitexco Financial Tower.*