

7 decisions that matter more than pace.

A practical guide for smarter training, gear, fueling, and race execution on real trails.

TRAINING

GEAR

FUELING

RACE EXECUTION

The useful question is not ?How fast am I??

Trail running punishes lazy decisions. Pace matters, but it is often the least transferable number in the mountains. Surface, grade, heat, footing, elevation, fatigue, and fueling can make a normal road-running pace target worse than useless.

This guide gives you seven decisions that produce better outcomes before pace becomes the thing you measure.

01 Choose the right effort metric

05 Practice hiking on purpose

02 Train your descents

06 Respect heat and altitude

03 Fuel before you feel low

07 Build a race-day decision tree

04 Pick shoes by terrain

01

Choose the right effort metric.

On technical trails, pace is noisy. Use a hierarchy: breathing, RPE, heart-rate trend, vertical speed, then pace. If the trail changes every minute, effort is the signal and pace is the shadow.

Field test: Run the same climb twice: once by pace, once by controlled breathing. Compare how your legs feel 20 minutes later.

02

Train your descents.

Downhill running looks free until eccentric muscle damage arrives. Add controlled descent repeats, strength work, and technical foot placement before race specificity peaks.

Practical move: one controlled descent session every 7-10 days during a specific trail block.

03

Fuel before you feel low.

Most trail fueling problems are timing problems. Start early, separate carbohydrates from hydration decisions, and practice gut tolerance at race intensity.

Practical move: set a timer for the first hour instead of waiting for hunger.

04 **Pick shoes by terrain, not marketing.**

Stack height, plate geometry, outsole, lockdown, and stability change meaning on mud, rock, roots, and descents. The fastest shoe is the one you can still trust late.

Ask: would I still choose this shoe when I am tired, wet, and descending?

05 **Practice hiking on purpose.**

Power hiking is a performance skill, not a failure state. Know the grade where hiking beats running, and practice transitions before race day.

Practical move: rehearse hike-run transitions on sustained climbs.

06 **Respect heat and altitude.**

Heat and altitude turn small mistakes into race-ending ones. Adjust expectations, expose gradually, and avoid pretending sea-level workouts transfer cleanly.

Practical move: define your conservative start before the weather makes the choice for you.

07 **Build a race-day decision tree.**

Decide in advance what you will do if your stomach turns, quads go, poles feel useless, weather shifts, or the climb arrives earlier than expected.

Good plans reduce emotional decisions after fatigue arrives.

Before the next long run or race block.

- I know which effort metric I will trust when pace becomes misleading.
- I have one downhill session or descent-specific strength block scheduled.
- I know my starting carbohydrate target and have tested it under fatigue.
- My shoe choice matches surface, descent stability, and late-race confidence.
- I have practiced hiking/running transitions instead of improvising them.
- I have adjusted for heat, altitude, and exposure instead of copying road targets.
- I have a simple "if this happens, I do that" plan for common race failures.

Keep getting the Signal: Turn each of these decisions into a weekly experiment. Trail Signal is built to help you test better ideas, not chase generic advice.