

Are you a slow twitcher or a fast twitcher? Try the standing jump test...

Our free range chickens have a leisurely life. We have eight; two of each breed – Buff Orpingtons, French Marans, Light Sussex and Brown. Four share one house and, next door, four share another.

After a hearty breakfast, they roam up and down our back garden, which is really a chunk of fellside and fairly steep. In keeping with the rest of the family I like to think they are a healthy lot. They certainly cover ground quickly when it is tea-time.

Today, but for quick reactions, they were almost breakfast when Sammy, our dogs' new best friend, arrived to play somewhat unexpectedly. Sammy is actually rather lovely if not a little exuberant.

The chickens had no choice but to become explosive and recruit their fast twitch muscles – their wings – quickly. This is exhausting for them and it can put them off laying for a day or two. Their usual mode of transport – their legs – are slow twitch and are not up to the job on these occasions.

Like chickens, we also have slow and fast twitch muscles. Genetics determine the combination we have. It makes sense that if your parents are marathon runners you could be too. Tennis on the other hand would require fast twitch muscles. So if your parents love tennis you could be a natural with quick responses.

You may have absolutely no idea where your strengths lie so why not try this fun test? Against a high wall stand with your arms raised above your head and chalk mark the spot you can reach. Then, from a standing start, jump vertically marking the spot you reach - now measure the difference.

If it is no more than 12 to 18 inches you are slow twitch dominant and not very

bouncy. 18 to 24 inches makes you a mixture of both fast and slow twitch whilst over 24 inches means you are fast twitch dominant.

So what does it all mean? Well if you are fast twitch dominant, you will have a more muscular physique. Picture Dame Kelly Holmes. Fast twitch muscles are good for rapid movements like sprinting.

If your muscle definition is leaner and longer it is a good indication that you fall into the slow twitch camp. Paula Radcliffe is a good example of this. You too, like Paula could be naturally gifted at endurance activities.

One day during a 100-mile time trial I went off course. I was horrified and tried to get back to the start but it was all in vain. A marshal, thinking he was being kind, suggested it wasn't an event for a lady anyway. While chatting to a spectator at the event – I had to watch – he mentioned a 12-hour coming up. To redeem myself and to prove the marshal wrong I entered it with only two weeks lead up.

As father put it, it was 'unknown territory'. With a distance of 240 miles I got course record and a couple of years later on the same course got a National Championship and another course record which still stands today at 243 miles.

My first 24-hour gave me the third longest distance in the event's 63 year history.

My training regime has never changed whether my plan is to race a 10-mile or 100-mile time trial or a 12 or 24-hour.

So you see it is possible if, like me, you have dominant slow twitch muscles to keep going for a very, very long time whether you choose to run, cycle or swim.

Your body type may be trying to tell you something. Instead of following the crowd, with the shorter distances why not reach that little bit higher just not from a vertical jump. 



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