



Lubricating Your Treadmill Deck Can Prevent Damage to Your Belt, Motor, and Electronics

by Jay Kern

In terms of cost savings, treadmill deck lubrication may be the single most important tip I have ever given. Lubrication allows the running belt to glide freely over the running deck. Without lubricant, the friction between belt and deck increases and damage can occur to the treadmill's electronics, motor, belt, and deck.

Know Your Treadmill

Deck lubricant comes in three types and it is very important to know which type your treadmill uses. The manufacturer, dealer or a service professional can tell you which type of lubrication is used on your treadmill. Remember, there is no such thing as a permanently lubricated deck.

Hard Wax Lubricants

Decks that use hard wax lubricants come closest to being permanently lubricated. Hard waxes are polyetheylene based, can last for about 10,000 miles, and have little wax build-up.

Only a few manufacturers produce hard wax systems. The wax is impregnated into a wooden deck such as hard board or plywood.

Unfortunately, a hard wax deck is very difficult to rewax. Most of these treadmills have two-sided decks that can be flipped over after 10,000 miles. After 20,000 miles, the deck and the belt should be replaced.

Soft Wax Lubricants

Soft wax, or paraffin, is the most widely used lubrication. It comes in powder, beads, blocks, or even liquid. Phonolic decks (black plastic), sometimes called melemine decks, use soft wax.

Some treadmills that use soft wax have automatic waxers to make the rewax easy. However, even auto-waxers must be checked regularly for clogs or malfunctions. They also need to be supplied with wax periodically.

For treadmills that must be rewaxed manually, most manufactures sell rewaxing kits. With such a kit, rewax soft wax systems every 500 hours or 2,000 miles. (Some manufacturers recommend rewaxing every three months.)

Rewaxing with soft wax is easy and takes less than five minutes. Distribute a level teaspoon of wax under the running belt and then walk on all sections of the belt at 1 mph for 1 minute. When rewaxing with soft wax, the amount used is critical. Too much wax and the deck will be gummy. Not enough wax and the deck will be dry. A dry deck can increase friction between the belt and deck enough to melt the running belt's backing.

Silicone-Based Lubricants

The third type of deck lubricant is silicone based. Silicone lubrication usually comes in a small packet of silicone gel. The packets do an excellent job and are easy to apply.

To rewax, apply the packet of silicone under the running belt and walk on all sections of the belt at 1 mph for 1 minute. Although the amount used is less critical than for soft wax, large amounts of gel will become messy.

Unfortunately, silicone lubricants last only approximately 250 hours or 1,000 miles. High-use facilities should reapply monthly.

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An Inexpensive Alternative

All three lubricants can be re-applied or checked easily. Most self-maintaining facilities just forget to do it. I recommend having preventive maintenance done by a service professional who will put your treadmills on a lubrication schedule. A service professional should know what type of system you have and how often to service.

If you've ever had to replace a belt, lower electronics, or deck because of improper deck lubrication, you'll agree that deck lubricating is cheap. Not lubricating is expensive.

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