

YES YOU CAN!



ANYONE CAN BECOME A RUNNER, NEVERMIND THE EXCUSES, THE WEATHER, OR THE BAG OF CHIPS CALLING YOUR NAME. HERE A TEAM OF EXPERTS—AND ONE RECENT CONVERT—SHOW YOU HOW
ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARCOS CHIN

MY NONRUNNING BROTHERS AND SISTERS:

If you throw on whatever shoes happen to be lying on the floor, step out the door, and take the first run of your life after reading this—if you do that and you don't find at least one thing to like about it no matter how small, you will not do it again. If you go out in a bluster of determination, your face screwed into a truculent mask of resolve, the words of some old track coach or PE instructor ringing in your ears—*No pain no gain, make it hurt so good, let's see a need to bleed*—you will find exhaustion, and discouragement, and humiliation, and you will not do it again. You are a grown-up, and you will leave the peas on your plate as you please; you will say

running is for other people, and you will convince yourself of that—you've tried it after all, and it was terrible.

Each of us belongs to a tribe whether we recognize it or not, and in this particular tribe, we don't run. Like many others, I'd held my running aversion as a kind of badge of honor. If runners think nonrunners are lazy, nonrunners think runners are compensating. I knew a guy who (drank like a fish) was a die-hard runner; a woman who (smoked like a log) was also good. Me and my nonrunning tribe? Our demons have neither the strength nor the darkness to justify the punishment of sustained exertion. We're just too well-adjusted to go running. I went so far as to say I didn't even *want* to run. That was a lie, of course. When I looked at the gazelles trotting along the sidewalks and roads with their reflective accents blinking at me through the windshield, it



If you can walk from the couch to the refrigerator, you are not too fat or too old or too slow to run.

wasn't that I didn't want to be with them, it's that I was convinced I couldn't be. When there is no hope of joining something, the best act of self-preservation is to disparage it, and I did.

At some point, though, you grow tired of holding up the conviction that running is a fringe activity—some manifestation of an extreme personality. Many undeniably smart and balanced people you know are runners. There is a light in their eyes, an unexplainable spring in their step. They eat like crazy and still look good in jeans. You see reserves of power in runners that seem to serve them through life's inevitable ups and downs so much better than a bowl of potato chips and a can of diet soda. Maybe you don't really pay much attention to the relative vitality of others but imagine there might be a way to feel better in your own mind and body than you do right now—a lot better. Or you feel the building momentum of a slow decline and won-

der if there is any hope in slowing it. You ran 20 years ago and have been meaning (for the last 20 years) to pick it up again. That's when it's time to shift your membership to the tribe of those who swore a blood oath against running, then broke the oath. There are many of us. Each one of us will tell you the same thing in our own way: If you can walk fairly well from the couch to the refrigerator, you are neither too fat nor too old nor too slow nor uncoordinated to do this. You can run. Not only that, you can enjoy your run from the first time out.

Keep in mind that I made my first run through the snow in boots. There are methods to begin running that range from simple to elaborate. My way was a step below simple. Call it stupid. I had no plan. My decision to run and the actual run itself took place within the same two minutes. I stood up and went outside and just did it. As flawed as that first attempt was in its details, I lived to tell the tale, and I'm still running today. Something about it worked. Should *you* learn about running before you try it? Should you probably start with walking? Should you consult an exercise physiologist or physical therapist or cardiologist before stepping out? Should you wear the proper clothing and have your foot and your stride analyzed by an expert at a specialty running store? Should you read the next several pages of expert advice from people who know what they're talking about? You absolutely should. If you're anything like me, though, you probably won't. Instead of using these basic, prerun instructions as guides to success, you are more likely to use them as obstacles to keep you from ever starting.

Speaking of starting, let's talk about this run you're going to do. Please don't stop reading here. You can take it easy. How easy? If you sweat, you've gone too hard. You don't have time? This won't take long, believe me. You'll get tired long before you make yourself late for anything. Weather bad right now? Lucky you—it will make for a more hard-core story. Here I am, asking you to run, hopefully you're thinking about doing it—this is hard-core—why not go all the way and do it in the rain? Dark outside? Good, no one will see you. Too cold? Not for long, I promise. Too hot? Come back to the house as soon as you want. Someone in the next room calling you? Shout back, *In a minute!* That's probably all the time you'll need to: (1) Step outside in



whatever you're wearing. (2) Run slowly. (3) Stop when it feels bad. (4) Walk back. (5) Tell someone what you just did.

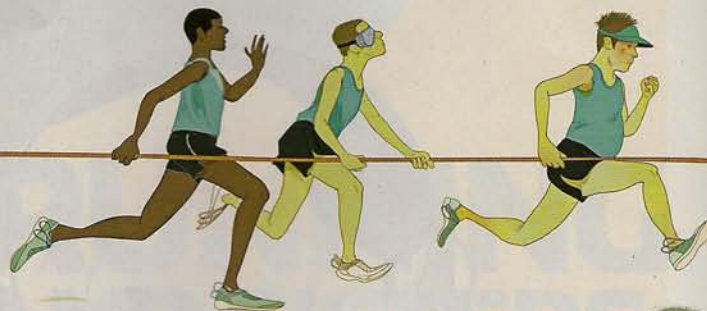
Only caveat here is that you have to go out specifically to run. It doesn't count if you run to the mailbox. Running for running's sake is different than running across the parking lot or running to catch the kids. And you're gonna look bad, partner, but you'll look bad only to nonrunners, and who cares what they think? You'll look bad from the vantage point of a couch. To other runners you're going to look tenacious, heroic, amazing.

Are you actually thinking about doing this? Don't think too

long. The mind says *maybe*, the stomach says, *sandwich*. Sandwich trumps maybe in every hand. If you go out and do this right now, no matter how short the distance, no matter how slow you go, it will be your first run. As simple as it will be, this first run will always have been your most difficult. Every run after this one, no matter how far or how fast you take it, will be easier. Keep that in mind and go slow. All you have to do is step out the door and let the road take you. —Marc Parent

TURN THE PAGE AND GET READY TO RUN. →

! YES YOU CAN



START RIGHT HERE

All you need to know to begin running for the first time **BY AMBY BURFOOT**

SO YOU WANT TO START RUNNING? You've heard it's inexpensive, great for your health, the best way to lose weight (and keep it off). You've got friends and coworkers who run, and they're trim, happy, centered, and productive. Running also looks like a straightforward enough sport. There's only one thing that's bothering you: If running's so simple, why do you have so many questions?

You're not alone. Every beginner worries about how to get started and has a lot to ask—about how to get motivated, what to eat, how to avoid injuries, and exactly when and where and how much to run. No problem. We've got the answers—from experts who have been teaching beginning running classes for up to 35 years, and from others who've certainly been around the block. Every runner began with a first step. You can, too.

INSPIRATION

"Help! I Need Motivation!"

Make All the Excuses You Want. Then Get on with It

You don't have time; you don't have the energy; it's too cold/hot/rainy; the dog ate your shoelaces. Uh-huh. Now go out and run. Online running coach and former educator Dean Hebert has heard so many excuses from his runners that he assembled them into a book, *Coach, I Didn't Run Because... Excuses Not to Run and How to Overcome Them*. "These excuses are real to people, and I don't diminish

them," says Hebert, who's based in Tempe, Arizona, and can be found at rxrunning.com. "I tell my beginning runners to concentrate on the one reason that brought them to running. A clear focus can work magic on your motivation."

Keep Track

Keeping a written diary is a highly successful way to stick with an exercise or diet program. It doesn't have to be fancy or sophisticated. Indeed, where you place the diary might be more important than what you write in it. Put a calendar on your fridge or in front of your computer, write down every time you complete a run, and take pride in watching those numbers build up. (Or feel guilty when they don't! That'll get you out.)

Keep at It

Some runners win gold medals and set world records, but no runner has ever done every workout he or she planned. You won't either. Stuff happens, but you can deal as long as you stay focused on the big picture. Shrug off the bad days, get back on the program, and you'll still achieve your goals—losing weight, gaining energy, improving your health, adding distance to your runs, and so on. Remaining persistent is crucial to improved running. "When beginners get discour-

aged or hit a plateau, I tell them to remember the time and effort invested and the progress they've made," says beginners coach Jane Serues. "You don't want to slide backward, you want to keep working toward the progress ahead."

Find a Fitness Friend

Beginning running coaches agree that one of the best ways to stick with your exercise program is to get a training partner. When someone is counting on you as much as you're counting on him/her, it's much tougher to blow off a workout. But it has to be someone of similar ability who is supportive, not competitive with you. "We emphasize the emotional power of training partners," says Serues, who's introduced 6,000 women to running in the Lehigh Valley of eastern Pennsylvania. "One or two is good. Three or four are even better."

I Can't Run Because...

"I'm out of shape, overweight, and I've never run before."

Just like the millions of couch-potatoes-turned-runners before you. "Beginners all say, 'This seems crazy. Can I do it?'" says Bob Glover, coauthor of *The Runner's Handbook* and New York Road Runners coach, who taught his first running course in 1973. "I tell them, 'Yes, anyone can do this. Runners come in all shapes and all ages. You just have to take your time, and stick with the program.'"

HOW WE GOT STARTED

- 36%** Competed in high school or college
- 21%** Walked, then got faster
- 16%** Ran on the treadmill at the gym
- 15%** Signed up for a race
- 12%** Got talked into it by a friend

Based on 4,704 respondents to a runnersworld.com poll



NUTRITION

"I Don't Know What to Eat!"

Pass on the Extra Carbs

Bread, bagels, pasta, potatoes, and pancakes—you just can't get enough, right? Wrong, says Boston-area sports nutritionist Nancy Clark, R.D., author of the new book *Nancy Clark's Food Guide for New Runners*. Running two or three miles at an easy pace will burn 200 to 300 calories, an amount so modest that it doesn't demand lumberjack portions of carbs (or anything else) before or after. Clark advocates eating healthy foods throughout the day, and having a small snack an hour or two before you run. "Exercisers shouldn't skip meals early in the day or try to run on fumes," she says. "But you don't require special foods after a workout—just a snack that offers a few carbs and a little protein."

Drink Water. But Only When You're Thirsty

Yes, runners sweat a lot. Yes, they need water, sugar, and electrolytes when they run for 90 minutes or more, particularly in warm weather. But unless you're training for a marathon this summer (which you won't be), you don't need sports drinks and an advanced hydration strategy. Sip a little water before your workout and a little more after. And skip the extra calories in sweetened drinks. "Be-

ginning runners don't need a sports drink, because they're not running far enough," notes Clark.

Eat Real Food

Runners, even beginners, tend to be driven, results-oriented people. When promised shortcuts, miracle cures, and unbelievable benefits from supplement and "superfood" manufacturers, they're easily swayed. However, eating standard, simple, unprocessed natural foods will give you the same end results. "Every time one of those vitamin or supplement studies produces a negative result, I am reassured that focusing on quality calories is the best advice," says Clark. "I've always believed that the healthiest foods are the real foods—the quality vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean proteins packed with everything runners need."

If You Want to Lose Weight...

Sorry, but you won't automatically drop five pounds just because you run, says Clark. You also have to reduce your daily food intake. Each mile you run burns roughly 100 calories. Cut out a cookie or two every day, and you can add another 100 calories to your weight-loss effort. "Reducing calorie consumption by just 100 calories a day will theoretically give you a 10-pound weight loss by the end of the year," Clark says. "Hit 200 calories a day, and you'll lose 20 pounds." Clark suggests cutting calories by eating smaller portions and fewer fried foods.

I Can't Run Because...

"I'll have to see a doctor first."

Maybe not. The American College of Sports Medicine says checkups are necessary only for those with increased risks: men over 40, women over 50, and those with significant medical problems, cardiac risk factors, or a history of heart attack. Even so, it's a good idea, says Lewis Maharam, M.D., medical director of the ING New York City Marathon and the Rock 'n' Roll Marathons, as well as a runnersworld.com medical blogger. "You especially need a physical if you haven't seen your doc in a while, and you're just starting to run," says Dr. Maharam. "Be sure to discuss your plans. Your physician will pay particular attention to certain things during your exam, and you might get an extra test if it's warranted."

"It takes too much time!"

We hear you, but consider the payoffs of just 150 minutes a week of "moderate intensity" exercise, as recommended by the American Heart Association and American College of Sports Medicine. With five 30-minute run-walk workouts per week, you can expect a reduced risk of chronic illnesses, such as heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity, colon cancer, breast cancer, anxiety, and depression. In addition, for the first time ever, the two medical-scientific groups acknowledged in 2008 that additional exercise would provide "even greater health benefits."

"I've started before but never stick with it."

New York sports psychologist Ethan Golgor, Ph.D., captain of the New York City Marathon psyching team, points out that we're all quitters in the sense that we have dropped out of some activity at some time. There's nothing wrong with starting again (and again). Says Golgor, author of *Psychodynamic Running: The Complete, Definitive Madman's Guide to Distance Running and the Marathon*. "If you miss one or two workouts, that's not the end of the world. Runners shouldn't 'must' themselves to failure with thoughts like, 'I must run every day my plan says to.' You can miss several days and still get back into your routine."



GET MOTIVATED AT RUNNERSWORLD.COM

Runnersworld.com has the world's largest collection of online runners looking for and sharing advice on motivation, training, nutrition, weight loss, and other important running topics—as well as an entire channel devoted to beginning runners, which makes this the best place to get your questions answered by people who were beginning runners themselves just a few months or years ago.

Find other runners like yourself on The Loop—a community platform that lets users create profiles, write blogs, share photo galleries, and more.

YES YOU CAN

INJURY-PREVENTION

"How Can I Avoid Injury, Or Worse?"

Stretch After You Run, Not Before

Runners have long believed that stretching will give them a longer, smoother stride and reduce their risk of injuries. However, in recent years research has failed to prove either point. Budd Coates and Jeff Galloway say they've never advocated stretching for their beginning runners, and the runners haven't developed injuries. Adds Dr. Lewis Maharam: "A preworkout stretching routine doesn't prevent injuries or improve performance, so there's no reason to do it. The time to do your stretching is after your run, or even later in the evening." Stretch (without straining) your calves, quads, and hamstrings for 10 to 15 minutes.

Expect a Little Tenderness

Sure, runners have to deal with occasional aches and pains. Especially beginners. However, these are temporary com-

I Can't Run Because...

"I'll get hurt and have to stop."

True, runners get occasional muscle and joint aches, but these should go away quickly. When veteran running coach Jeff Galloway began teaching beginners in 1974, he was worried about some of the participants. "But everyone finished the class," says Galloway, RW columnist and author of *Running: Getting Started*. "You don't get injured if you follow the 'no huffing, no puffing' rule."

"I can't afford new running shoes."

A pair of light, good-fitting sneakers or walking shoes works fine. "You don't want to wear old sneakers that don't even fit," says Budd Coates, who has been teaching running at Rodale (publisher of *Runner's World*) for 20 years. "But you don't need to buy new shoes. You're not going to be doing high mileage."



GEAR

"Do I Need Fancy Stuff?"

Buy the Right Shoes

You don't absolutely, positively need a new pair of running shoes when you begin running. You can run in your comfortable cross-trainers, sneakers, or walking shoes. But when you're ready, the right pair will make your runs more comfortable while adding extra injury-prevention features. Selecting these shoes, sad to say, can be a complex process. That's why it's smart to go to a specialty running store. The experienced staff will make sure you get shoes that fit right and provide the biomechanical support you need. Expect to pay \$85 to \$120. "We know how to look at your foot when it hits the road, and that makes a huge difference," says J.D. Denton, senior writer at *Running Times* and owner of a Fleet Feet running store in Davis, California.

Wear Polyester

You don't need a lot of expensive gear to run, which is good news in a recession. That said, you'll never regret the dollars you spend on breathable socks, and even shirts and shorts. These garments, made from polyester fabrics, are a world apart from the scratchy material your father ran track in. The best are lightweight, soft, and nonchafing. "They'll prevent blisters and rashes," says Denton, "and they'll actually help keep you cooler in summer and warmer in winter."

Forget About Gadgets

Heart-rate monitors, GPS systems on a watch, accelerometers that tell you how fast you're going, cell phones with astonishing tools—none of these glitzy products will help your first efforts. All you really need is a watch with a stopwatch function, available for around \$30 at any drugstore, to help you keep track of your walking and running intervals. Don't worry about other fancy gizmos. But if your iPod makes your workouts go better, by all means take it with you—as long as you run in a safe place.

plaints, and don't lead to long-term damage. Last summer, the *Archives of Internal Medicine* published a study on a group of runners who were first investigated in the mid-1980s when they were 50 years old or older. Twenty-one years later, these runners, now in their mid-70s, were found to have better function and overall health, and less disabilities than similar individuals who had not been running for two decades. When you experience mild aches and pains, follow the tried-and-true RICE prescription: rest, ice, compression, elevation. Don't overuse pain meds and anti-inflammatories (see "The Pill Problem," page 51). "The over-the-counter meds are not perfectly safe and aren't meant to mask pain," says Dr. Maharam. "Overuse can lead to liver, stomach, and kidney problems."

You're (Almost Certainly) Not Going to Die

Yes, heart attacks happen, and they make headlines. But these events are extremely rare, averaging about one for every 800,000 half-hour workouts. Meanwhile, it's a well-established medical fact that runners and other highly fit individuals have a 50 percent lower risk of heart attack than nonexercisers. It's more dangerous to sit in front of your TV. The heart is a muscle. If you don't exercise it, it becomes weak and flabby. Still, every runner should know the signs of a heart attack: unusual shortness of breath; chest, arm or neck tightness (especially on the left side); nausea; and a cold sweat. If you experience these, stop immediately, and call your doctor.



WHY WE RUN

- 50%** To stay healthy
- 19%** To lose weight
- 16%** To run fast or race
- 8%** To let off steam
- 7%** To get energized

Based on 10,265 respondents to a runnersworld.com poll

TRAINING

“So How Do I Do This?”

Start Slow. Back Off

Most beginning runners worry that they're not improving fast enough. Don't compare yourself with others. Every runner gets into shape according to his own body's schedule. Physiologists have calculated that any and all running paces are fast enough to put you into the moderate-to-vigorous aerobic zone that delivers health benefits. (For more guidance on pacing, see "The Starting Line," page 36.) So take your time and focus on going farther, not faster. "We tell people that

they didn't get out of shape in five weeks, and they're not going to get back in shape in five weeks," says Bob Glover.

And Again: Go Slow

If you feel out of breath or sick to your stomach, you're running too fast, a mistake made by perhaps 99 percent of beginners. "A lot of people think that they have to go at least a mile at a time, and at a good clip," says Budd Coates. "I always tell my beginning runners to slow down and take more walk breaks." When you slow down and/or walk more, your breathlessness and nausea will go away. You'll learn that running should be a relaxed activity, and that you should "train, not strain." And, yes, beginning running includes lots of walking. Get over it.

Run Tall and Relaxed

For the most part, you don't have to worry about your technique. That said, experts agree that you should run tall (not slouched) and straight (not leaning far forward or backward). Don't overstride; that could put extra strain on your knees. "Run with your eyes focused about nine feet ahead," says Jane Serues. "Let your arms relax, down around your waist, and take a natural, comfortable stride."

Whenever and Wherever

Is there a best time and place to run? Sure: whenever and wherever is most convenient. Finding ways to fit workouts into your schedule is more important than fretting over the when/where questions. Neighborhood roads, a high school track, a treadmill—all good. Beginners should stick to relatively flat running. Hills dramatically increase the muscular and aerobic strain of a run. Run against traffic, so drivers can see you. After all, you're in this for the long run. **EW**

YOUR FIRST* PLAN *And Easiest

The best way to start? Add just a few minutes of running to your walks

IF YOU CAN WALK CONTINUOUSLY for 30 minutes, you can transition into a running program by gradually adding running to a couple walks per week. Start running at an easy pace, and stop as soon as you're breathing hard. Walk until you feel recovered. Then run again. If you can run only 10 seconds at a time, that's fine. (And if you can run comfortably for 10 minutes at a time, go for it.) As you get fitter, gradually run more and walk less. But as soon as you begin breathing hard, slow down. This plan consists of five workouts a week, to accumulate 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise, as advised by leading medical groups.

1ST MONTH: Weeks 1 through 4
 Three days per week: Walk 10 minutes. Run-walk 15 minutes. Walk 5 minutes. **** Two days per week: Walk for 30 minutes.

2ND MONTH: Weeks 5 through 8
 Three days per week: Walk 5 minutes. Run-walk 20 minutes. Walk 5 minutes. **** Two days per week: Walk for 30 minutes.

3RD MONTH: Weeks 9 through 12
 Three days per week: Walk 2 minutes. Run-walk 25 minutes. Walk 3 minutes. **** Two days per week: Walk for 30 minutes.