

COURSE CORRECTION

WANT TO BE AT THE MARATHON FINISH LINE NEXT YEAR? HERE'S HOW TO OUTPACE THE MOST COMMON RUNNING EXCUSES.

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WITH THE LITTLE ROCK MARATHON set for the beginning of the month, runners across the state are lacing up their shoes for the main event. The day will be a spectacular sight, with cheering fans lining the route and thousands of support staff and throngs of athletes pacing their way to the finish line after months of training.

IF EVER YOU NEEDED INSPIRATION to join in, this is it. But before you run out the door and sign up for next year's race, a few common excuses may cross your path along the way. Luckily, all it takes are a few tips and tricks to keep you on course.

1. I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO RUN

Do you have 15 minutes? You have time for a run. There are no rules about how long a run should be; in fact, shorter distances can often deliver the biggest results. The secret to maximizing your time is something called a fartlek—known outside the running world as interval training. Instead of running at a steady pace, segment your workout into periods of higher intensity and lower intensity. For example, try running fast for one minute and backing off to a moderate pace for two, for a total of 15 minutes. If watching the clock isn't your thing, get creative and measure your intervals in blocks, streetlights or paces. This short and effective workout will quickly work up a sweat and keep your metabolism going well beyond your cool-down.

2. RUNNING IS EXPENSIVE

Running is actually one of the least expensive forms of exercise out there. There is a lot of fancy gear on the market—everything from GPS watches and compression socks to hydration belts and moisture-wicking undies—and it can be tempting to think all of it is needed for a comfortable and fun running experience. But aside from a pair of properly fitting running shoes, the only gear you really need is probably already tucked into your dresser drawer. Running is only as expensive as you

want to make it, but if you play your cards right, it can be an annual investment totaling less than your monthly cable bill.

3. RUNNING IS BORING

Running can be boring, but watching television can be boring, too. The key is finding something that makes the process exciting and worth your while. Shake things up and meet new people by joining a running group. Drive to a local park and explore a scenic new route. Tap into your sense of adventure and sign up for a mud run, obstacle course, color run or partner relay. Enroll in a running clinic and learn a few new techniques. Or download a virtual training partner and challenge yourself to a race. Whatever it is, get creative and keep an open mind about ways to keep the miles interesting.

4. I CAN ONLY RUN BEFORE/AFTER WORK AND DON'T WANT TO RUN IN THE DARK

With busy schedules and long hours at the office, most runners have to set aside time to run before or after the sun goes down. But don't let the dark scare you away from a workout. Having a few essentials and a plan can make all the difference in creating a safe, fun experience.

Visiting a track or mapping out a route with plenty of overhead lighting is a confidence-boosting way to have a sure-footed run. If that's not an option, a small headlamp is a great solution for dim or dark routes. Newer models are light, comfortable and inexpensive. Feeling uneasy about your safety? Wear reflective clothing to stay visible

to passing drivers, leave the headphones at home, and always carry identification. If you carry a phone, apps like Fitnio can deliver peace of mind by allowing quick access to an emergency contact should you run into any trouble.

5. RUNNING ON PAVEMENT MAKES MY KNEES HURT

Running on pavement for long enough will make anyone's knees hurt. That's because joints withstand the pressure of up to eight times your body weight each time you take a stride. Luckily, there are other surfaces that are a bit easier on the knees, including the soft cushion found on unpaved trails. Dirt, packed sand or other trail substances help to absorb the impact of running and allow your knees to breathe a bit easier.

While your knees may be the first to thank you for hitting the trail, your body won't be far behind. Trails are rarely as flat, straight and clear as sidewalks, making runs a more interactive experience—jumping over roots, dodging branches climbing up hills. This effective, full-body workout will build strength and agility.

6. I WANT TO RUN A RACE BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START

Training for a race can seem daunting, particularly if it's your first. There are enough how-to books and training plans out there to make your head swim. Put your mind at ease by joining a running group that is training for the same race you are. There are a number of options to choose from, ranging from large national organizations to small groups that meet at a local running store. They offer camaraderie and support, and will keep your training on target from start to finish. All you have to do is show up and enjoy the experience. One of the best things about these groups is that they often attract runners of all paces and experience levels, making them a great place to ask questions, learn and develop your comfort level. And on race day, you'll have a built-in support team of friendly faces joining you on the course and greeting you at the finish line. **AL**

