

Ep #11: Proper Running Form



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jill Angie

Podcast with Jill Angie

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Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you're a woman who is midlife and plus sized and you want to start running but don't know how, or if it's even possible, you're in the right place. Using proven strategies and real-life experience, certified running and life coach Jill Angie shares how you can learn to run in the body you have right now.

You are listening to episode 11 of *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. I'm your host, Jill Angie, and in this episode, we're going to talk all about running form, post-run soreness, and as usual, my current obsession. So whether you're a brand-new runner or an experienced pro, or maybe even just contemplating it because all your friends are doing it, you are in the right place.

This week's Ask the Curvy Coach question comes to us from Sheila B. Sheila writes, "Jill, I started running about a month ago to train for a 10K, which I have just walked through in the past. The first time I ran, I was slow but I felt energized; that runner's high. And I did two miles and wanted to do more, but I knew better than to push my luck. Since then, I've been running on the treadmill at least five days a week, between two and 3.5 miles. I'm extremely sore after every run. I'm taking magnesium every day, L-Glutamine twice a day, and BCAA after my run. I also foam roll my legs and sock in an Epsom salt bath every night that I run. I am less sore the next morning, but when I start to run the pain comes back. Do you have any suggestions? Is this normal? Will it pass with time? The inspiration to start running and training came from your first podcast. Thanks to you, I don't have blisters on my feet. Yay, episode one. After listening to your last one, I started interval running. My time improved drastically and I have also lost a little weight. I'm really loving this new me. Thanks for being you, Sheila."

First of all, Sheila, I want to say thank you so much for your question. And also, congrats on signing up for your first 10K, I know you're going to love it. It's super fun. Now, soreness after running is a really common

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occurrence, and you don't say in your letter whether it's just your - whether it's in your joints or your muscles, so I'm going to assume that it's muscle soreness. And if you do have joint pain during or after each run, especially if it's in your knees or your hips, I want you to go see your doctor.

But if we're going to talk just about muscle soreness, the main red flag I see here is that you've been running for a month and you're already doing five days a week. That's really a lot for a beginner and the fact that you have to do so much to just manage the soreness is another red flag.

So what I'm going to do to start with is strongly suggest that you take a few rest days immediately. Because if you are sore after every single run and you have to do all of those things just so that you're able to be comfortable, this is a clear indication that you are pushing your body too far right now. So give yourself a few days off right away, and then I want you to start back running with just three days a week.

So make sure you always take one day off in between your runs, give those legs a chance to recover. Since you're new to running, your body needs to build up that endurance and you're pushing it way too hard right now. This can actually lead to injury if you do too much too soon, and then in that case, you won't be running at all.

So stick with three times a week, never two days in a row, for at least the next month, maybe even two months. Then, when you can run without having pain afterwards, you can add a fourth day for the next month or two, and then you can go back to a fifth.

Now, I know what you're thinking, and I promise, three days a week is more than enough for you to train for your 10K. You just need one long run a week as you build up the mileage for the race and then two shorter runs of maybe 40, 45 minutes.

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You might also be concerned about doing less running, having an impact on your weight loss. First of all, I want you to know that running doesn't actually burn that many calories in the grand scheme of things. So two miles might burn 250 calories, but a fair amount of that is energy you're burning anyway, just if you were sitting still.

So for the net burn for a couple miles of running is really more like 100 calories, which is not much. And if you push yourself to the point of injury, you won't be able to run at all for a while, as I mentioned before. So running is great for so many things: overall confidence, fitness, like, it's basically therapy for most of us, so it definitely has a place in a weight loss program, but not from the perspective of calorie burn.

So I want you to back off the frequency right now, build up your endurance, and then slowly reintroduce the extra runs when you can do a single run without being in pain afterwards. All the stuff that you are doing to manage the pain is fine, it's not going to hinder you or hurt you, and if it makes you feel better, that's great.

I would highly recommend, and you might already be doing this, but you didn't say so in your letter, make sure you're warming up before every single run with a five-minute walk. That's really, really important because it gets your muscles ready to go. It's like instead of running a car and just hitting the gas right away, we start a car and we let it warm up for a little bit. So think of your body the same way.

And then after you run, I want you to spend three to five minutes at least, stretching all of your major muscle groups. So spend some time on that after you run and that's also going to help with your soreness.

Now, if you want to get your question answered on the podcast, all you have to do is email me at podcast@notyouraveragerunner.com. I'm going to pick one each week to read and answer, and you could ask me anything.

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Now, if I pick your question to answer on the show, I'm also going to send you a Not Your Average Runner car magnet. So, yay for that. Keep them coming.

Onto our main topic of the week. So for the past few weeks we've really been diving into managing your thoughts and feelings about running, and that's amazing stuff, and it's probably 80% of what I teach, but I want to switch back a little bit to a more technical discussion this week and that's about proper running form.

Now, everyone's body is different from the length of your legs and your torso, to the way your joints are put together, to how your body fat is distributed. No two people are exactly alike, which means there's no perfect running form that will work for every single person.

I have seen some pretty whacky runners in my travels. There are folks out there with such crazy running form that you kind of wonder how on earth they get from point A to point B without hurting themselves. But the deal is just because it looks odd doesn't mean it's wrong. And if you're able to run injury free while breaking some of the cardinal rules of running form, well, I say, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

But that being said, there are some general guidelines that I think can help you become a stronger, less injury prone runner. And running form also, by the way, involves your entire body. It's not just about your legs. So keep that in mind, but we are going to start with the legs. We're going to work from the ground up.

So first of all, how you land on your feet is really, really important. A heavy heeled landing - and you know the people I'm talking about. Like, when you hear them walking down the hall it sounds like they're angry at the floor. It's like, bang, bang because their heels are jamming into the floor.

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If that's how you're running or walking, it can actually lead to shin splints as well as other injuries. And shin splints really suck. In general, I recommend aiming to have your feet land directly onto your hips. When your feet are landing out in front of your body, that's when you have a heavy heel landing.

If you let your feet land softly under your hips when you run, like, imagine your feet landing more on the middle of your foot than on your heel, this means taking shorter steps and moving your legs faster, but it results in a much lighter landing, and it allows your leg muscles to do the shock absorption rather than your knee joints.

And if you are plus sized, which most of my listeners are, this is really especially important because you have extra weight, which means extra impact to your joints. So it's super important for you to work on your running form and your landing, and again, it's also going to help you avoid the dreaded shin splints.

Now, one way to know if you are landing with your feet under your hips is when you're running, just tuck your chin and look straight down at your feet. If you can see your toes peeking out in front of your body while you're running, you're doing great. If you can see your entire heel, you are landing too far in front. So I want you to shorten your stride, just literally, take shorter steps.

It takes a little practice and it might feel unnatural at first, but when you get used to taking shorter steps, you build up lots of strength in your calves, which really assists you as you start running longer and longer distances. And it also, again, helps you avoid shin splints.

So keep your feet low to the ground with each step as well. So a lot of times we think - you imagine what it looks like when you see those Olympic sprinters and they're bounding forward and they're getting all this air

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underneath them like a gazelle, right? And it might look like fun, it might look amazing, but it uses a lot of energy.

Propelling yourself in the upward direction doesn't move you forward, it moves you up. So I want you to conserve your resources for forward motion, keep your feet low to the ground, and you'll be able to go farther and feel better.

So that's your feet and your legs and your stride. Now let's talk a little about your torso and your head. So when you're running - and I know this sounds obvious, but we forget sometimes when we're running and we're getting tired. Keep your body upright. It's really easy to slump forward a bit from the shoulders, or even from the waist, especially if your core muscles, which includes your abs, your back, and your chest - if your core muscles are on the weaker side, you are going to be tempted to slump forward because if your core is weak, you know, it takes a lot more energy to keep your body upright.

But over time, this can really - like, if you get into that habit, it's going to degrade your running form, you're going to have backaches, you'll overcompensate in your hips, you'll find you'll have glute problems, it compresses your chest cavity if you're caving forward in the chest, and that squeezes your lungs and reduces your capacity to take full deep breaths.

So there's a huge impact when your running form is such that you're not upright. So you can help yourself do this is a few different ways. The first is ensure your head is up by resting your gaze about 20 to 30 feet ahead of you.

When your eyes are constantly looking straight down at the trail, that means your head and your neck are going to follow, and soon you're going to be running all hunched over. So focus on looking for obstacles in the distance instead of immediately in front of you. And if you see them in the

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distance, you can correct and run around them or whatever. It's not like you're going to - it's not like you're not paying attention to what's in front of you. You're just looking farther ahead and scanning farther ahead.

So every few minutes when you're running, do a little form check. If you run with your phone, you can actually, you know, program that in. Like every five minutes or something have your phone beep at you and say hey, do a form check.

So a form check looks like this: you're going to make sure your gaze is forward, your head is up, your gaze is forward, your shoulder blades are kind of pulled back, and your torso is upright. And I like to imagine a string coming right off the top of my head, pulling my whole body upwards, almost like a marionette.

This eventually creates the habit of running that way all the time. And when I say bring your shoulder blades back, I mean sort of like, let your shoulders relax down, kind of pull your shoulder blades together in the back. I almost try to think of like, what if I were trying to put my shoulder blades in my back pockets. That's like, a good visual to think of. If you were trying to do that, how would you move your body?

Okay, so create that relaxed way of running, and then we're going to talk about arms and hands. So your arms can either help you or hinder you when you're running. Now, if you're pumping them back and forth really hard, like you may have seen during an Olympic sprint, this is actually kind of a hindrance.

And it all goes back to you know, managing your energy, right? So we want to keep our feet low to the ground to save our energy for forward motion. We don't want to put a lot of energy into pumping our arms back and forth because again, that's energy that could be used to move our legs forward.

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So I want you to keep your elbows bent at a 90-degree angle, keep your hands loose; clenching your fists takes energy. And allow your arms to move loosely back and forth when you run. Their job is to counterbalance the opposite foot and help you ever so slightly with forward momentum. But you're not driving yourself forward with your arms, they're just there to kind of balance you out. Otherwise, they're in the way.

Now, to keep your hands loose while you're running, I want you to imagine you're holding a potato chip between your thumb and your middle finger, and you don't want to break it. Imagine you have to get to the end of your run and that potato chip needs to be intact.

Now, putting all of that together, it's like - I don't know if you've ever gone golfing and you take a golf lesson and there's like, 90 million things that they try to teach you and you're like, there is no way I am going to be able to put that all together, it's too much to remember. So it might take a bit of time to assimilate.

So I want you to implement these things one by one and master them. But it all starts out by assessing your current form. So how you're going to do that - there's two ways to do that. Now, the first is if you have access to a treadmill, the easiest thing to do is run on the treadmill and have somebody stand next to you with their phone and film you.

Or set up a tripod, or if there's a shelf, you could just set your own phone up and like, record yourself running. You don't necessarily have to have a friend do it. Or if there's a mirror, if you have a treadmill next to a mirror and you can watch yourself. But I really think like the filming is super, super helpful because it's an objective viewpoint, and you can see really where you need work.

So here's what I know - there are some of you out there thinking, I can feel you thinking this: "Hell no, I don't want to see what I look like on video,"

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right? That's the first thing that comes up when I say, hey, I want you to video yourself running. Happens with my clients all the time.

So if you're thinking that, I just want you to know it's only your inner mean girl talking and honestly, saying that you don't want to see yourself running is kind of like an ostrich pretending he's invisible by hiding his head in the sand, right? I mean, it doesn't work because everyone else can see him. He's not invisible.

So when you have that reaction, I just want you to know that you're just - it's just that you're afraid of what your inner mean girl's going to say about you. That's it. And as you know, from the past couple episodes, she can have opinions, that's fine. We don't need to believe them.

So I want you to decide ahead of time that your inner mean girl is not running this show. The goal here is to become a stronger runner, and really the only way to do that is for you to have an objective, clear understanding of where you are now so that you can make the adjustments, move forward, and improve.

And I also promise, you look way better than you think while you're running. You think you're out there flailing around, or you think you look like a turtle or whatever else your inner mean girl says to you. You look fine.

And the other thing I want you to think of is the video is kind of like a progress picture. So video yourself now, then work on all of these form features for the next three months and then take another video. And you'll be able to see improvements, and then you get to be super proud of yourself. So just go do it. I promise it's going to be worth it.

Now, if you don't have access to a treadmill, you can have somebody watch you run outside and give you the feedback that way, or film you and give you the feedback that way. I mean, I urge you to get the video

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whenever you can. I understand sometimes there are reasons we can't. So just do the best you can but having somebody else watch you and give you verbal feedback based on the instructions I've given you in this podcast, they can help you and say, hey, I did notice you were crunching forward a little bit from the chest, or, it kind of looks like you're landing on your heels.

Often, we don't even notice what we're doing when we're running. That's why it's so important to have this objective stuff because it's something we've organically developed and you know, the longer you run without adjusting your form, the more ingrained the bad habits get. Especially when it comes to holding your body upright when you're running. It's super common to cave in at the chest or bend over a bit from the waist.

Those are really the first muscles to get tired when you run because our leg muscles are super strong. So have a little patience with yourself. Pick one form item to work on for a couple weeks, and then when you've mastered it, move on to the next.

And actually, that is your challenge for this week. I want you to first, look at your running form either on video or by having a friend give you feedback. And then pick one thing to work on for two weeks. Dedicate your runs during that time to really focusing on perfecting your form in that area, and I promise you're going to start to see benefits immediately.

The main thing that I'm obsessed with this week, and honestly, every week I'm obsessed with this, is my clients that are in my Run Your Best Life group. So many of them are really rocking out their running programs this month, and I'm going to shout out to a few of them.

Jen just ran her first 8K, Kathy finished her first triathlon and her first 15K, and Julie also just did her first 15K and is now signing up for her first half marathon. And seriously, that is just a teeny tiny little slice. And if I didn't mention your name, I apologize. Those are the ones that came off the top

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of my head, but there are so many more success stories in this group. And I'm actually going to be featuring them on YouTube and on the podcast going forward.

So one thing that I love so much about all my clients is that they are just so committed to their success. They've all had setbacks, some have had injuries, some have had just life events that have happened and so forth, but they've all had the setbacks but they still keep showing up for themselves week after week after week. And they never seem to let failure bring them down.

And first of all, I think that's the reason for their success is because they don't make failure, meaning, I missed a run, or, I had a bad run, or, I had a bad race, or whatever, they don't make any of that mean that they're not succeeding as a runner. They're just like, I had a shitty run, that happens, right?

So I think the reason that my clients seem to be so committed is twofold. First of all, I don't know, I seem to attract some pretty badass women to my tribe, and if you're listening to this, that means you too. Because it really takes a shit load of courage in this world to be a runner when you're not a size six. Am I right?

Like, we - this tribe of ours, we are disrupting the fitness world. Did you know that? We are creating change in the world just by going out there and running when we're not a size six or we don't look like something on the cover of Runner's World.

All of us, every single woman, every single one of you that gets out there and goes running, or cycling, or swimming, or rock climbing, or triathloning, or whatever it is, when you're plus sized and you don't fit into that norm, you are showing the world what true strength, commitment, and courage is because you are willing to step up and not let other people's opinions

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influence your dreams no matter how many people say to you, "Oh, you're too fat to run. You'll hurt your knees, you'll come in last. You're not a real runner," right?

By ignoring all of that bullshit that people say and still showing up to the start line or still showing up on that treadmill at the gym, you are truly disrupting the entire fitness industry and creating a revolution, and that is a big fucking deal. That is how change starts. Right here, with you and me, and that willingness to do things your way.

And so the clients that I'm seeing in my Run Your Best Life group, they're all sort of displaying that mindset of like, I don't really care if the world thinks this is a terrible idea. I'm going to do this thing because I want to do it and that's the end of it, right?

So they're so committed and they're getting some amazing results. And I'm just really celebrating them this week because they are all badassess. I mean, every single week when I get on our live video coaching calls, I am just so happy to hear about their accomplishments and see how courageous they are. It's like, medal after medal, race after race, run after run, they are just so awesome.

This cracks me up. One of my clients actually posted a photograph on Instagram that she went running and when she got done, she took a selfie and realized she had blood running down her face because somewhere along the line she'd scratched herself and hadn't even noticed that she was so focused on her run. Like, if that's not badass, I don't know what is.

So I mean, I just want to give a shoutout to every single one of my clients and just let them know how proud of each of you I am and how I just can't wait to see the incredible things that you are creating for yourselves, and how much of an example you are to the rest of the world because one

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person can influence so many other people just by being themselves and doing what they're meant to do in this world.

Now, this is a pretty incredible tribe. If you are thinking, hey, I might want to be a part of this group of women because they sound pretty awesome, well, it's really easy. This coaching group is called Run Your Best Life. I know I've mentioned it before, but I don't talk about it too terribly much because I really want to focus on the content in the podcast. But this Run Your Best Life group, I help all of my members go after their running goals. it's literally that simple.

So if you want to run a half marathon, I'll help you get there. You want to do your first 5K, I got you covered. Brand new beginner, you don't know where to start, I've got you covered there too. It's like, sort of a full-service kind of situation and there's so much good stuff there, and the women in that group are just incredible.

So if you're an incredible woman and you're like, hey, I need to be there, all the details are over at www.runyourbestlife.com, and again, if you've been listening to the podcast thinking, hey, I'm ready to take this to the next level, just go check it out. Let me know what you think. Maybe join, and let's go have some fun.

Well, our time is up again, my friend, and as always, it has been my pleasure talking to you this week. Please make sure you check out the show notes at www.notyouraveragerunner.com/11 for all of the details, including the transcript for this episode. And I really think you should go download the transcript and print it out so that you can use it when you're evaluating your running form because all of this stuff is going to be in that transcript.

Now, next week I have a super special guest to share with you and I debated whether to tell you about it or not, but the word is out. Some

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people already know, so I'm interviewing The Mirnavator, also known as Mirna Valerio, and I'm sure you know who she is. If you don't, Google her. She's an amazing person. She's a personal friend of mine, and you definitely don't want to miss out on that interview.

So I am deeply, deeply glad that we are on this journey together, my friend, and I hope you have an amazing week of running, and I will talk to you next week. Bye.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you liked what you heard and want more, head over to www.notyouraveragerunner.com to download your free one-week jumpstart plan and get started running today.