

Ep #136: Should You Do a Run Streak (and How to Do it Right)



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With Your Host

Jill Angie

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There's a sense of accomplishment when you set a goal and you achieve it, especially when you push yourself way of your comfort zone and make something happen that you didn't know you could do.

Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you're a woman who has never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you are in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, a certified running and life coach and I teach women how to start running, feel confident, and change their lives, and now I want to help you.

Hey rebels. So I am pretty excited today, and why is that? Because it is spring time. It is the best time of year to run, and I dare you to disagree with me on this. I will fight you. And it's just like, the flowers come out and all the runners come out, there's no more treadmill, there's nothing better than running out on a spring day. Just nothing. It is my favorite time of year to run without a doubt.

But it also means that the Rebel Runner Roadmap is opening up again in like, two weeks. Two weeks, you guys. So the first round of students in the Roadmap totally kicked ass. Lots of them are writing in to say how much fun they are having now training for races, how much better they're running after taking the class, how much more they enjoy running. They feel more confident, stronger, they're going faster, they're going farther. They're just really killing it.

And we also had a ton of students that went through the last class who were not runners before they took the class. In age ranges from like, 30 to 76. We had a wide age range of students as well, and now they're all runners. And they're writing in saying, "You changed my life. I'm a runner now. This is amazing."

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They finished their first 5K, they're training for the next one. They totally blew their own minds. So if you have not taking the Roadmap yet, I want you to make sure that you sign up for the next round. And if you want to get on the notification list for opening day, hop on over to rebelrunnerroadmap.com and submit your email address, and then we will email you the second that signups are open.

So before we dive into this week's discussion, I want to just touch really quickly on Covid-19 because it's a thing, you guys. It's here. Races are getting cancelled left and right. I mean, everything is getting cancelled left and right, but this is a running podcast so I want to talk about the impact of your races getting cancelled.

And I know from Run Your Best Life, so many of my clients in that group are kind of feeling frustrated because they've trained for races, for sometimes for months and months, and then boom, cancelled. And they're like, "It's not fair, they're taking away all my hard work and all that hard work was for nothing."

And I want to address that because first of all, I'm not going to comment on whether cancelling a race in the current climate that we have going on in the world, I'm not going to comment on whether it's smart or wrong or unfair or the right thing to do. That's none of my business, to be honest. I do not work for the CDC or the World Health Organization and I trust that the officials that we have, our public officials know what they're doing and are using the best information to make the decision they feel is right for public health.

But here's the deal you guys; a race being cancelled is simply a circumstance. The race being cancelled doesn't make you feel disappointed. It is your thinking about it. You can choose to think whatever you want about the circumstance of a race being cancelled or postponed.

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And then remember, whatever you decide to think, whatever story you want to tell about that is going to determine your emotions and then your actions. Now, it is normal to feel disappointed, especially if you've been looking forward to it for a while. And I'll be honest, I have, in two weeks, actually less than two weeks, a week and a half, two weeks from when I'm recording this podcast, I have a 5K on Saturday and a half marathon the next day.

So I'm running the Philly 5K that Saturday morning, the 28th, and then on March 29th I've got the Philadelphia Love Run, which is a half marathon. I've been training for it for three months. I'm very excited for both of these races and as of the time I'm recording this podcast, it's likely that they're both going to be cancelled. At least one of them. I'm pretty sure.

But that is the circumstance. And I can think and feel whatever I want. Now, when I think about it now, I'm like, I really wanted to do that race, I wish it wasn't cancelled, and I feel disappointed. This is pretty normal. And it's normal for everybody. If you've been looking forward to something for a while and you're thinking, "That's going to be so much fun, I can't wait, I'm looking forward to finishing this race and crossing the finish line and getting my medal and going out for pancakes afterwards," you're going to feel disappointed.

But spending time dwelling on how it's not fair or the race being cancelled negates all the work that you put in, all of that stuff, they took it away from me, that's not super helpful because then that makes you feel kind of frustrated and angry and there's definitely a flavor of self-pity in there. And when you have those emotions going on in your body, you don't necessarily show up for your life the way you want to.

So I want you to know that there are a lot of things you can do if your race gets cancelled. And it may mean that you don't do the race the way you expected, with 20,000 other people, but nobody can stop you from running.

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So I want you guys to do your mental work around it. If your race gets cancelled, and you know, chances are good. If you're signed up for a race within the next four to six weeks, there's a good chance it's going to be cancelled.

And you got to be prepared for that, so do your mental work around it. Run your race anyway first of all. That's the number one thing. Pick a route and get it done. Nobody can stop you from doing the distance. You trained for the distance. And it's pretty safe to be outside. When you're running, you're not getting close to anybody else anyway if you're running by yourself. It's way safer from the perspective of disease transmission.

So pick a route, get it done. Don't waste the training just because your race isn't going to look the way you thought it should. If you can, do it with friends. And maybe you don't have friends who are trained, maybe you're running a marathon and you don't have friends that are trained to run that whole distance. Fine. Get five friends, have them do five miles each with you.

Have people set up aid stations for you. Get some buddies to cheer you on, make some race signs, create your own finish line. Oh and guess what, there's no time limit now. So if you were worried, "Oh, I might not finish my half marathon in the time limit," boom, you're going to finish your half marathon in plenty of time because there is no time limit.

So get the fuck out there. Do the race you trained for. Do not waste your training. Don't drown yourself in self-pity. The group activity that you planned for is cancelled. The money that you spent, yeah, you know what, you might not be able to defer until next year, you might lose that money. But don't lose the training.

Don't lose all of the effort that you put in. The group activity is cancelled but your run has not been cancelled. Your race, the distance has not been

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cancelled, so don't quit on yourself. That's my little rant about the situation that we're finding ourselves in right now. Very unexpectedly, at least in this part of the world. And you get to choose how you react to it, so choose wisely.

Alright, now let's talk about something a little more fun. One of the most common questions I get asked as a coach is how many times a week should I run. And most non-runners come to me and their belief is that runners run every day. I should run every day, that's what I should do.

You guys, this is a terrible idea. It's terrible because rest is important. Rest, the time when you are taking a moment to not run, to not exercise, to not stress your body, that's what gives your body a chance to absorb the training. It lets your muscles recover and get stronger. And without rest, and by rest I don't mean taking a few hours off after your run and then getting up the next morning and going out again.

That's not rest. You got - 24 hours. Without that time period, your body doesn't get a break and then the next thing you know, you're injured, you're burnt out, you're miserable. So I actually recommend only running three to four times a week. Three if you're a beginner, four if you're more advanced or you're training for a longer distance race like a half or a full marathon or an ultra-marathon.

For ultra-marathon, you probably got to be running five times a week. Now, strength training twice a week, and if there's time, you can throw in some cross training like yoga or cycling or something fun like that. Zumba, whatever it is that you love to do. And then a rest day where the most strenuous thing that you do is walk.

This is what I love. On my rest day, I do yin yoga, which is a restorative yoga. It's done completely like, either laying down on your back or your stomach or your side. It's amazing. That's a rest day. That's where you're

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just kind of allowing your body to just kind of take a moment and absorb all the training that you've been doing.

But of course, everybody is talking lately, maybe it's just me, I'm seeing it all over Facebook, they're talking about doing run streaks. Maybe it's a 30-day streak where you run every day. Some people are like, I'm going to run every day for a year. And they're like, it's so motivating, and it's fun to see all the days add up and feel really proud of yourself, and I get it.

I've done run streaks before, so I totally understand. There are pluses and minuses to it, and that's really what I want to dive into today is what are the pros, what are the cons, and then if you're going to do a run streak, how can you do it the right way.

So let's talk about the pros first because I'm all about the positive. It's fun. There's no denying it. Setting a goal, like a 30-day run streak and then watching the days pile up feels awesome. And then once you've got a few days under your belt, there's this extra motivation to keep going because you don't want to lose your streak. You get excited thinking about it. It's fun. It's super fun.

And that extra motivation, it can get you up and running and moving on days when you would much rather sleep in. Because we've all had those days. We're laying there in bed and we're like, nope, just not feeling it. And then in your mind pops a thought, and if you're on a run streak, the thought might be, "If I miss today, I'm going to have to start all over again from the beginning," and that doesn't sound like a lot of fun.

So sometimes realizing you're going to have to start all over again if you skip a day might be exactly what you need to get that workout in. There's also a sense of community if you're doing it with other people, and even if you're doing it with people online that you've never met in person, there is

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this amazing sense of community because you can cheer each other on. It feels so good to know you're a part of something with a big group like that.

Humans have a very deep primal need to belong. And things like run streaks can really help create that. You might even make some new friends, and it really feels good to be part of the group. And then of course, there's a sense of accomplishment when you set a goal and you achieve it, especially when you push yourself way out of your comfort zone and make something happen that you didn't know you could do.

Like you might think, "30 days, fuck no, there's no way I can run 30 days in a row." But then you start and you keep doing it, and then you finish and you're like, holy shit, look what I just did. And then you start wondering, what else can I accomplish? What else am I capable of?

So it can really elevate your ability to imagine doing things that are outside of your comfort zone. And I love this about run streaks. Basically, a run streak is like a game. Games are fun, keeping up your streak feels like winning. Humans love to win. And streaks satisfy that desire.

So yeah, there's a lot of reasons to do a run streak. But there are definitely some downsides that are worth considering. So first of all, running every day really can lead to injury. Ask me how I know. But seriously, especially if you're a beginner, it can over-stress your body. And even Olympic athletes take days off, you guys.

Recovery is part of training. It is not separate from your training, it's part of it. Rest is part of your training. It's a part of your strategy. A very important part. So your body is getting stronger when you take those days off, and without that time, you're going to end up getting weaker overall.

Trust me, it is not fun to find out that you have injured yourself in the pursuit of making yourself stronger. The irony is never lost on me when that

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happens. So for sure, think about what is your tolerance for injury because running every day can create a situation where you're more likely to get injured.

Now, let's talk about that motivation thing because on the one hand, using a run streak to motivate yourself feels like, oh, it's a no-brainer, it keeps me motivated. But if you start to rely on something like that to keep you motivated, what that means is you're really not developing the mental strength to do things for any other reason than to make sure you do it perfectly, that you do it 30 days in a row.

You lose those deep meaningful compelling reasons when you're just saying I just need to do this so that I can put the 30 days after my name. So if the only reason you're running daily is so you can see that streak number go up, you are really going to struggle to stay motivated at other times.

And really developing the skill of thinking in ways that create a feeling of motivation so that you get out there and you keep your commitments to yourself and you keep training, having an arsenal of ways that you can create motivation for yourself is really, really important. And if you rely on run streaks as the only thing that does that, you're kind of going to be screwed because you can't do them forever.

So just really think about why you want to do the streak, and if the point of the streak is to keep yourself motivated indefinitely, it's not going to work like that forever. And we've actually been talking about this concept a lot in Run Your Best Life lately because perfectionists love streaks of any kind.

Because it makes them feel like, oh, look how good I am, look how perfect I've been. It gives them that sort of righteous worthy feeling of like, look at me, I did it perfectly. Even if they're not saying it out loud, they're thinking it to themselves because they believe that if something's not done perfectly, it shouldn't be done at all.

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Or if something's not done perfectly, that they are somehow failing. And so I believe that expecting yourself to do a run streak and then adhere to that 30 days in a row, if you're a perfectionist and you're the kind of person that if you slip from that 30 days that you're going to beat the shit out of yourself, a run streak is probably not for you.

Don't set yourself up to trigger those behaviors that you know you have, or set yourself up for it, but make sure you're doing your thought work ahead of time. Make sure you're going into it knowing like, if I slip up, this is how I'm going to think about it, this is how I'm going to do the mental work about it, instead of believing my default, which is, if I didn't do it perfectly, I've failed.

So I want you to really think about the concept of the run streak as why are you doing it? What is the point? If it's literally for a little bit of fun, then in a moment, I've got some recommendations on how you can do it safely and get all the fun out of it. But if you're relying on streaks to be your sole way to motivate yourself, I want you to re-evaluate.

So with all that being said, do I recommend doing a run streak? Well, yes. Unless you're doing it for some perfectionist fantasy reason, I highly recommend doing them from time to time, but with modifications. I think there's a lot to be gained if you do them right. So how can you get the run and the benefits without the downsides?

Well, it's got three ideas for you. The first one is limit your mileage. So on three days a week, you're going to do your normal mileage, whatever your training plan says, and then on the other four days of the week, the days that you still want to be streaking, so to speak, I want you to do a half a mile or a mile at most.

So four days of the week you're going to do a half a mile or a mile or maybe you say like, on those four days of the week you run for 10 minutes.

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The rest of the days you can do your normal training plan, but on four days of the week, you're going to run just enough so that you can check the box but you're not going to over-stress your body. So that's number one. Limit your mileage.

Okay, number two, instead of 30 days in a row, play a different version of the game. So you're going to say for the next 30 days, how many of those days can I go for a run? That way, you don't have to start the streak over if miss a day. And then you can always repeat the game later in the future and try to better your score.

So for example, say your target is how many days can I go running in the next 30, and over that 30 days, you go running 24 times. So that's awesome. That's about six days a week. That's pretty amazing. And then the next time you do your game, you can say, "Oh, I wonder if I can get to 26 this time. I wonder if I can get a couple more."

This one is mostly for the perfectionists out there that think that if they don't do it 30 days in a row that it's a failure. Flip the script and see how many days you can do a run within the defined period of time, instead of how many days in a row can you get.

And then number three, make teams. You guys, I think this is a brilliant way to do a run streak. Make up teams of two to three people, and then maybe your streak is 30 days or 60 days or whatever, and somebody from the team has to run every single day.

So maybe person number one runs days one, three, five, and seven, and person number two runs days two, four, six, and eight. Maybe it's an every other day thing. But your streak is as a team. Make the streak a team goal instead of an individual goal, and then you'll all get to go out and celebrate.

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So I kind of love this idea because it takes a little bit of the pressure off, and then if you're thinking, "Oh shit, I can't get my run in today," you can call in another team member and say, "Hey, can you pick up the slack today or what?" So make it a team goal. Kind of like a marathon relay, only it's a streak relay.

So those are my three suggestions for you. Limit your mileage, instead of 30 days in a row, see how many days you can go within the next 30 days, and then make it a team effort. So those are my ideas for doing a run streak and as always, make sure you're doing your thought work around it so that you know the reasons that you're doing it and you're not beating yourself up if you're not getting the results that you want.

And if you're wondering what thought work is, this is the first time you've listened to this episode, make sure you check out episode 33, which is where I talk about how to coach yourself and I teach you all of the principles of thoughts, feelings, actions, and results that we talked about in today's episode. Got it? Good. Now get your ass out there and run and I will see you in the next episode.

Oh, and one last thing. If you enjoyed listening to this episode, you have to check out the Rebel Runner Roadmap. It's a 30-day online program that will teach you exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you've always wanted to be. Head on over to rebelrunnerroadmap.com to join. I'd love to be a part of your journey.