

Ep #187: Treadmill Tips and Tricks



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With Your Host

Jill Angie

[The Not Your Average Runner Podcast](#) with Jill Angie

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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. How's it going? Is it warming up where you are? Because right now, New Jersey is very undecided. One day it's in the 40s, next day it's back in the 20s, but most of our snow is gone, so that is something. And a little-known fact about me, I do not believe in the spring equinox. Spring starts on March 1st as far as I'm concerned. Any snow after that is a crime against nature.

Also, summer starts on Memorial Day and fall starts on Labor Day. That is my story, and I am sticking to it. Anyway, this week I want to talk about treadmills. Now, I probably should have done this episode a couple months ago when everybody was in the throes of winter weather, but I know there are a lot of you that are still struggling with the cold and ice.

Or maybe you get up super early and you don't want to run alone outside at 5am in the dark, or maybe you like to watch TV when you run. Whatever it is, we are all about the treadmill today. So I'm going to do a quick overview of tips and tricks and safety, and then I'm going to cover some of the most common questions people ask, such as why is my GPS not working when I'm on the treadmill?

You would not believe how many times I get asked that question. We're also going to talk about what to do if you get bored, whether it's okay to use the treadmill during half marathon training, all kinds of stuff like that.

Now, in my opinion, even if you have the best outdoor running in the world available, right outside your front door and you live in a place that never has bad weather, I still think you should master the treadmill. Why?

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Because there will be times when running outside just isn't possible or it's super inconvenient.

And maybe there's a crazy ass thunderstorm during your only running window that day, or you're traveling and you don't want to run alone in a new location and the only option is the hotel gym. So if you know how to use a treadmill, if you feel confident on the treadmill, you don't have to miss out on your run. You can stay on your training schedule and all is well.

So treadmills, if nothing else, make a great backup plan. But they're also an awesome tool to help you become a better runner. You get instant feedback on your pace, which makes it a little easier to dial in your effort on each interval. And you can keep track of your distance much more easily. It's right in front of you. And it's also a great place to practice your running form without needing to think about where you are going.

So the first thing you need for treadmill running is the confidence that you're not going to fall off. And I know there are some of you listening that do not have that confidence. I totally get it, by the way, especially if you've watched some of those treadmill fail videos. They're always on YouTube.

And you know, somebody trips and face-plants and gets swept right off the back and everybody thinks it's hilarious, and meanwhile you're cringing because you're like, that looks like it hurt, right? So the thing about those videos is that the person falling off the treadmill is almost always doing something kind of stupid that makes it happen.

Like they hop on the treadmill when the belt is already going 10 miles per hour, or I just saw one the other day where a woman is walking on the treadmill and she decides to take off her sweatshirt and basically isn't paying attention and she's taking her sweatshirt off, her eyes are covered, and she just slows down her walking pace until she's fallen off the back of

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it. Like, well, duh, stop the treadmill if you got to take off your sweatshirt. It's super simple.

But honestly, you don't see people falling off treadmills when they're paying attention, facing forward, and following safety precautions because it just doesn't happen. So if you've watched those videos and you think that you're going to fall off, I promise you're not. You're really not. Treadmills are actually super, super safe.

But let's start out with some basic safety guidelines anyway. First of all, getting on the treadmill. So you're never going to start the belt before your feet are on it. So you're going to make sure the belt is stationary, then stand on the belt when it's not moving, facing the display. Familiarize yourself with the speed up and down buttons, the incline up and down buttons, the stop button, the emergency cord.

You don't really need to worry about anything else. Most treadmills have at least two safety features built in because humans are humans and have a tendency to do silly things. And the manufacturer does not want to get sued. So treadmills have fail safes that stop the belt on command so you don't get hurt.

The emergency cord, which every treadmill has, it has a clip on it that attaches to your clothing. And then that clip is attached to the machine via magnet. So if you get too far to the back of the belt, the cord is going to pull away from the machine because it's attached to your clothing and the belt's going to stop. So pretty much every treadmill really has one of these. And if you are nervous, use that feature.

The second important safety feature is the stop button. It'll be big, easy to find, and right near the front handle. So if at any time you feel like you're going to fall or slip, hit that button immediately and it will slow the belt right down. So those two things for sure are going to keep you safe.

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Now that you've gotten the safety tour, let's talk about how to start up the machine. Again, you're going to stand on the belt when it is stationary. You don't want to jump on the treadmill when the belt is already moving. So stand right in front of the display, hit the speed button, the up button a few times to get it up to 0.5 miles per hour.

Now, some treadmills will have a quick start button that will bring it up to 0.5 miles per hour automatically, but it's not - if you hit the start button, it's not going to ramp you up to three miles per hour real fast. It's just going to ramp you up to 0.5 miles per hour, which is really slow.

So if you did that speed for a 5K, it would take you six hours. It is slower, way slower than a stroll, and it is the perfect speed for you to get used to walking on a treadmill. So take a few minutes on your first time on and just walk slowly. And you can hang on to the side rails or the front rails if you really, really want to. But after a few minutes, try taking your hands off and see how it feels.

And if you feel unsteady, keep your head and gaze up. So a lot of times when we feel unsteady on a treadmill, it's because we're looking down at the belt. We're looking at our feet, or we're looking off to the left, or to the right. When you're on the treadmill, head up, gaze up. Looking forward at eye level. Don't look down at the belt while you're moving.

Now, once you are confident at that speed, you're going to bring it up to maybe one mile per hour and then just hang there for a little while. Keep your hands off the rails. Get used to it. You're going to be tempted to hold on. I totally get it. But I promise, you really don't need to.

And remember, your body knows how to walk. Have you ever walked on a moving sidewalk at the airport? You don't need to hold on there. It's very natural. The belt is moving, you feel comfortable walking without holding

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on. Treadmills, pretty much the same thing, just without luggage. So it's actually easier.

So you're going to practice walking without holding on. If you need to, 30 seconds at a time, and then work up to a minute, and then two minutes. And if you're comfortable without holding on right away, awesome. But if you're not, you can ease your way into it. And it may take a while to build up your confidence and that's okay. It's totally worth it because as you get more practiced and confident, you're going to be able to increase the speed.

So the other thing I want to offer you now is if you're nervous about the treadmill, it's okay. It's okay to be nervous. It's a new piece of equipment. You've never used one before, or maybe you did use one and you had a weird experience on it. It's okay to be nervous. It's just your thoughts saying, "I don't know what's going to happen." So don't judge yourself for not being able to use the treadmill yet. You're going to practice, you're going to gain confidence, and you're going to get there, I promise.

Alright, here's another treadmill tip. While you're on the treadmill, to keep you safe, remember that your body goes where your eyes go. So you're going to keep your gaze forward and level. Straight forward. Not looking down at the display, not looking down at your feet, not looking to the left or the right.

Keep your gaze forward as much as possible. Do not read on the treadmill. First of all, it can really distract you from what you're doing because reading requires a lot of attention. And you can kind of get so absorbed in what you're reading that you block out everything else around you because your gaze is very focused on something that's probably sitting right on the treadmill display.

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So that's one way to fall off the treadmill and get injured. So don't read on the treadmill. If you want to watch TV on the treadmill, that's totally awesome. We don't get as absorbed and drawn into the TV, especially when it's several feet away. It also doesn't require as much brain power to just sit back and passively consume a TV show. A book requires you to think and process and turn pages and you shouldn't be diverting that much of your attention away while you're on the treadmill.

But if you are going to watch TV on the treadmill, again, make sure that that TV is directly in front of the treadmill. You don't want it off to the left or the right because you're going to be tending to drift in that direction if you're looking that way. So directly in front of the treadmill at eye level. I don't want you looking down, and I actually don't want you looking way up either because it's going to bother your neck.

Okay, once you are confident walking on the treadmill, it is time to do a little bit of running. So running is just going a little faster than walking. That's it. You can totally do this. So you're going to punch up the speed little by little until you need to jog a bit to keep up with the belt. Just a really slow jog. No sprinting.

Do that for 15 seconds, then bring the speed back down and recover, let your brain come back to normal, and then try it again and build your confidence like that. So again, that speed, you don't need to punch it all the way up. You're just going to put it to a point where you can't keep up with the belt because you can't walk fast enough to keep up with the belt so you have to jog a little bit.

Now, I can feel you asking me what speed you should use. And the answer is it depends on you. If you're comfortable walking at a three mile per hour speed on the treadmill, maybe you try jogging at a four. If you're comfortable walking at three and a half miles per hour, maybe try jogging at four and a half miles per hour pace.

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When you make this transition, you can hold on to the rails at first if it helps your confidence. But eventually you're going to want to transition away from that because it's going to impact your running form. And I just gave you some numbers as examples. Remember what I told you before that is when you're ready to start practicing running, you're going to push the speed up slowly until you have to jog to keep up with the belt.

So that might be four and a half miles, it might be four miles, it might be three and a half miles per hour for you. Doesn't matter. The point is that you want to get the belt going fast enough so that you need to jog a little to keep up with it.

Okay, you're going to practice that until it feels normal and relaxed. It might take a while. That's okay. You might have to come back and practice a few times. It's totally fine. We're not judging ourselves here. You're learning a new skill. You're learning a skill that's going to help you in the long run, so make sure you take your time and get really confident with it.

Now, when you're at a point where you can comfortably walk and run on the treadmill without holding on, it is time for your first workout. So on the treadmill, just like when you're running outside, you're going to start out by walking for at least five minutes to warm up.

And at this time, you can stop the treadmill and restart it if you don't want it to count your warmup time in your workout, or you can just make a note of the distance you covered in your warmup and subtract it out later, whatever you want to do. I recommend using a standard timing app on your phone for your intervals so you don't have to think about it.

Just ramp up the speed up and down when your phone beeps, unless you're lucky enough to have one of those extremely fabulous treadmills that you can program intervals, but not many of them do that right now. Follow that workout. So you're going to do your warmup and then do your intervals

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and then come back to - when you're done with that, you're going to come back to a cool down walk and bring the belt back down to zero before you exit.

Don't forget to wipe everything down that you touched with whatever sanitizer they provide at the gym if you're working out at a public gym. Don't forget to stretch. And that's it. Those are the basics of running on a treadmill. And if you've never done it, I really want you to give it a try, so you have one more weapon in your training arsenal.

So now I want to address some of the most frequently asked questions about treadmills. And the first is why does it feel so much harder on the treadmill than outside? Or why does it feel so much harder outside than on the treadmill?

So here's the thing you guys; treadmills are not always calibrated. In fact, they're rarely calibrated. So that means that two treadmills of the same exact model sitting right next to each other can show the same speed on the display, but the belts might not be moving at the same speed.

So that means first of all, if you use a different machine every week at the gym, you might notice it feels really hard one day and really easy the next and think, oh, something's wrong with me because I had them both set at five miles per hour. But in reality, it's just that the treadmills aren't calibrated.

And that also means that when you're running outside at five miles per hour and then you're running on a treadmill and it says five miles per hour, that might not be the same speed. And there's other factors associated with why it feels different, treadmill versus outside, but a big part of it is that treadmills are notoriously inaccurate.

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So they're not - and I shouldn't say notoriously inaccurate. They're not wildly inaccurate but they're usually off enough that you can see differences between them. So this is why I really recommend when you're on the treadmill, go by your effort level instead of getting obsessed with the numbers on the display.

So let's talk about GPS. Sometimes people try to use their GPS on the treadmill so that they can get an accurate pace. But the problem with Garmin or Runkeeper or whatever GPS you're using is that GPS measures the distance traveled by seeing where you are and then when you move to another point, it calculates the distance between those two places.

With a treadmill, your position relative to the Earth does not change. So the GPS thinks you're stationary. And also, if you're indoors, the signal's not going to - you're not going to get a GPS signal anyway. But even if you're on a treadmill outside, in the middle of the sunshine, the GPS would still not record you as moving a distance because you're not. You're not going anywhere.

Your position relative to the Earth has not changed. But what happens is the GPS does register that you're taking steps, especially if you're using your phone. It registers that you're taking steps and it gets a little confused. So it's like, I don't know, she's taking all these steps, but she's not going anywhere.

So this is why you sometimes see those crazy Runkeeper maps where it looks like a three-year-old scribbled all over the place. So there's one way to get around this and it's to use a foot pod. Like Garmin makes one, Nike makes one, and they measure the number of steps that you take, and you also put your stride length in.

And so it can estimate the distance that you've "traveled" by taking the number of steps and your average stride length. But otherwise, don't

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depend on your GPS to give you the results of your treadmill run because it's not going to work.

The other thing - I'm getting a little confused here. Can I just stop and tell you a fun story? I just bought this fabulous new robe. I've been working with a personal stylist and we are up-leveling my pajama game and I'm wearing just the sexiest silk robe that has all these dogwoods and birds on it. And I keep getting distracted by how pretty it is and forgetting about what I'm saying, so I apologize for that.

Anyway, when you're training for an outdoor race, most of your running is going to be outside. So I don't want you to worry too much about your treadmill stats. Your goal is to use the treadmill to get time on your feet when necessary, get a great workout, work on your running form, have it as a backup plan. Nobody is running a race on a treadmill. So most of your running should be outside when you're training for an outdoor race.

And real quick, I also want to talk about the elliptical because a lot of people are like, "Well, I don't have a treadmill but I do have an elliptical. Can I use that in place of running?" And the answer is no. Ellipticals have no impact. Your feet never lift off the pedals so even though the motion seems kind of similar to running, there's no impact.

So it doesn't really train you for running at all. It can give you a great cardio workout, but it is not a substitute for running. So a lot of you also were like, "Well, maybe I could use it for cross training." And again, no. Just don't. So unless you're injured and your physical therapist specifically prescribes time on the elliptical, which can happen, it's not a substitute for running and it's not cross training.

And again, I know it seems like it should be. The motion is similar to running. But running is high impact and you need to train for that. And if you want cross training, do something different, that has a different motion

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than running, like cycling, swimming, yoga, dance class. Don't bother with the elliptical because it's really not giving you a lot of benefit if you're not an injured runner.

So another question I get is how often should I train on the treadmill. So in my opinion, if you're doing an outdoor race, you really should be doing as much training as possible outdoors. But that being said, there's going to be times that a treadmill is the best option.

So a good rule of thumb is to plan for all of your long runs to be done outside and then if you need to run on the treadmill for one or two runs a week, make sure they are the shorter workouts. And honestly, I mentioned this before but running outside is going to feel different. So you have to get used to running outside if you want to run races.

If you never plan to run a race, you can do all your training on the treadmill. That's totally fine. But if you're going to run outside for an event, you need to be training under those conditions. You're going to have wind resistance, weather, terrain, ups and downs, changes in elevation, stoplights, sidewalks, different kinds of surfaces.

All of that takes practice. And one way that you can ensure that you're ready for an outdoor race no matter what conditions come at you is to make sure that you're training outside in all conditions. But obviously there are going to be times when you need to use a treadmill.

So if you are going to be on a treadmill, even though you're doing an outdoor race, you've got a couple treadmill runs a week, maybe one a week, or maybe it's a couple times a month, whatever, you can simulate outdoor conditions to a certain degree by setting the treadmill incline to 2%. 1% to 2%.

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So it gives you a little bit of resistance, you can also practice hills during your treadmill workout, and maybe one interval you do flat and then the next interval you do it at a 5% incline to simulate running on hills. So you can do a lot with the treadmill controls to get more of an outdoor experience.

Alright, another complaint I hear about the treadmill is how boring it is. So you guys, boredom is a result of thinking thoughts like, “I hate the treadmill. It’s so boring.” Or “I’d rather stick a fork in my eye than run on the treadmill.” Now, I hear you. There’s not as much to look at when you run indoors. There’s no fresh air.

You’re just surrounded by a lot of hot sweaty people panting, unless you’re fortunate enough to have one of those Peloton treads in your home and you get to look at the hot sweaty people on the screen, but none of them are around you. I am envious of you if you have one of those because I would love one. Our apartment is way too small for a Peloton tread. Some day. Some day.

Anyway, the circumstance here is that you’re running on the treadmill. The treadmill is not boring. The treadmill is neutral. Your thoughts about the treadmill are what is creating the feeling of boredom or frustration or whatever it is. So you can run on the treadmill and think your shitty thoughts and feel bored or resistant, and I suspect if you think that way, it’s going to mean that you skip more workouts than you want to. But you can always change up your thinking so you don’t end up feeling bored.

So here’s a great example. Right now we’re kind of in the middle of a polar vortex. Texas is frozen solid, people. And I’m hearing all these people saying it’s too cold to run outside, it’s too icy, but I hate the treadmill and now I’ve missed three training runs, what do I do?

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So here's what you do. You get over it, sister. Yes, it's cold outside. You also have a race to train for, so you got three options. You can bundle the fuck up and get out there, or you can get your ass on the treadmill and do your miles, or you can have a pity party, skip a bunch of training runs, and then have a shitty race. Those are your options.

So I usually opt for bundling the fuck up and getting out there because I like running in the cold. I'm more likely to run on the treadmill in the heat of summer when it's like, 100 degrees outside and I'm like, oh hell no. I'm like, I get my ass on the treadmill and do my miles that way.

But really, those are your options. You train outside, you train inside, or you have a pity party and you fail. So you choose. Just don't blame the weather on your attitude. The weather is not causing your attitude. You are.

Now, today we are specifically talking about how to keep from being bored on the treadmill. And again, being bored is just drama in your head about it. Seriously, it's your inner toddler throwing a fit because he's not getting what he wants. But the problem is when you keep saying to yourself, "I can't stand the treadmill, it's so boring, I can only do a mile before I quit," you feel terrible when you say those things. But they're not true. They're just your thoughts. Why do you want to torture yourself like that?

If I offered you a million dollars to do 10 miles on a treadmill, I'm pretty sure you'd enjoy every single minute, right? There would be no whining, there would be no complaining. There would only be smiling and imagining what you'll do with your money. That's how I know the treadmill is not the problem. You are the problem if you're bored.

The treadmill is a path to what you want. Maybe it's a million dollars, maybe you got a sugar daddy who's going to give you a million dollars to do 10 miles on the treadmill. But maybe what you want is running your goal race like a boss. So you've got to change your thinking about the treadmill.

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So try these on for size. I'm so happy to have access to a treadmill so I can keep training, even when it's -20 degrees outside, or even when it's 117 degrees outside. This treadmill means I don't have to miss a single training run. I don't have to worry about icy roads or getting heat stroke on the treadmill. Running on the treadmill means I can binge-watch Netflix and get my workout in. If I don't want to run hills, I don't have to run hills on a treadmill. I can make it perfectly flat.

So those are some thoughts that you can think instead. I urge you to come up with your own as well. And here we go, the final question I get all the time about the treadmill is how do I not sound like an elephant? And first of all, everyone sounds like an elephant on the treadmill. You don't sound any louder than anybody else. You're just in your own head. That's all. You've got your headphones in and all you can hear is yourself, you can't hear anybody else. You're just closer to the sound of your running, so it seems louder.

But honestly, if it feels like you're running heavy, you probably are landing maybe a little hard on your heels. So I would play around with running lighter by running on your tiptoes. And not for your whole run. You're just going to try it for a little bit.

So you're going to get the treadmill going, maybe start out a slower speed than you normally do and run on your tiptoes and see what that feels like. You're going to notice how much lighter you land when you run on your tiptoes. You're going to notice how the muscles in your legs do a lot more of the shock absorption than your joints.

And so you could take that feeling when you start to switch back to running at a faster pace with your normal gate, you can start bringing that feeling into it. Another technique is to focus on landing on the part of your foot that's between your heel and the arch of your foot. That's sort of a mid-foot landing. And again, this will force you to land a little bit lighter.

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And another thing to try if you feel comfortable doing this is to take your shoes off and run in your bare feet or run in your sock feet on the treadmill and notice how quickly you lighten up your stride. And so try one of those techniques. See what it feels like to run lighter and then you can bring that into your regular running gear.

But really, if you're not having any issues with the way you're landing, this is another thing, if you want to sound like an elephant on the treadmill, that's not a problem. If you have a heavy landing on the treadmill and you've been running like that for a while and you don't have any injuries, you don't need to sound lighter on the treadmill.

That's not a requirement to be a runner. And there are people that I've seen, tiny little people, little teeny tiny people that make a ruckus on the treadmill because they are just running so hard and I'm like, you can't weigh more than 90 pounds, how are you making so much noise?

So it has nothing to do with your weight, it has everything to do with how you land, and you can change that if you want to, but again, I think if you're not really having any issues when you're running outside with how you're landing, I would just say, look at that, I'm just a loud treadmill runner and that's okay. The problem isn't with you sounding loud on the treadmill. The problem is what you make it mean and what you think other people are thinking.

And I don't know, I just like to think if I'm landing loud on the treadmill, that people are thinking, wow, she's working really hard. But really, what they think is none of my business. So you do you, you let other people do them, and just get to it. Get out there, get your time on the treadmill, get that practice in so that you've got that amazing backup plan for when you need an option that's not running outside.

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And honestly friends, running is like 10% physical and 90% managing your mind. I've said this a million times. I swear to god, manage your mind and your feet will follow. Manage your mind around the treadmill and you'll always have a backup plan. Alright my rebellious friends, that is it for today. I love you. Stay safe, get your ass out there and run and I will talk to you next week.

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.