

Ep #192: How to Shift Your Body Image



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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. So we've got a really important topic today, my friends. I'm going to be discussing your body image and how it is impacting your exercise routine. But first, I want to let you know that the Rebel Runner Roadmap is open for registration right now.

And if you have been waiting for months to join, now is the time. And it is springtime here in the US, it is the time that we all want to get out there and start running, and the Roadmap is your class. It's a running program like no other. It is perfect for beginners, for people coming back to running after some time off, or for someone who wants to up-level her running.

Because we are going to dive into running form and breathing and pacing and stretching and strength training. All the foundational skills of running and the stuff that supports your running. But we also work really hard on your mindset.

We work on getting all those bullshit stories and excuses out of your brain so you can get the fuck out of your own way and run. It is 30 days of learning, practicing, community, connecting with others, and becoming the runner that you want to be.

So class starts on April 26th. You can sign up at rebelrunnerroadmap.com. Again, that's rebelrunnerroadmap.com, open for registration right now. I hope that I see you there. If you have any questions, please reach out to me on Facebook or Instagram or email support@notyouraveragerunner.com and let me know. But you need to be in this class. This class is a game-changer. Rebelrunnerroadmap.com.

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Now, let's come back to your body image. Because I think a lot of the time people are like, "Well, I'm able to do my workout, I might hate what my body looks like, but I'm still doing my workouts and it's not really impacting me." But you know what, it kind of is. And you might not think you're hurting yourself if you're secretly hating on your cellulite, but guess what, it's actually possible to love your body at any size or shape without changing it, without losing your cellulite, it really, really is.

And we're going to talk today about why I think that is so important, why it can be a game-changer for you, and hopefully, if you're somebody who's kind of like, no, I'm just going to keep over here, hating on my body, hopefully it'll help you think about it differently.

So I want to start with a story. I was talking to a friend the other day about bodies and we were both talking about COVID and I gained 20 pounds during COVID, and she's like, "Listen, I really do want to start running but I can't run in front of other people." And if you're going to train for a 5K, you kind of need to run outside because that's where the 5K is going to be.

So she's really - she's kind of struggling. And I'm like, "Well, why? Why don't you want to run in front of other people?" And she's like, "Well, I look disgusting. My butt jiggles, my arms flap, nobody needs to see that." She's like, "I got to lose weight before I can ever run outside in my neighborhood or before I could ever run in a race."

And I'm trying to be serious but inside I'm laughing because she's a good two sizes smaller than me and here I am running around my neighborhood in shorts and a sports bra, I don't give a fuck because I don't have a problem with how my body looks. It's got lumps and bumps and cellulite and it jiggles like crazy when I exercise. But it's also an awesome body because it lets me do all kinds of fun things.

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So I really am not super concerned about what it looks like. But I get that I've done a lot of work on my body image and not everybody has done that. So we talked about her butt and her arms and her belief that she can't let other people see her exercising and she's pretty solid in that belief that those body parts are disgusting, her words, not mine, and she just really, really hates how they look.

And here's the thing; it's holding her back from so much. It's not just running. She won't go sleeveless in the summer, even if it's 100 degrees outside because she's like, I don't want to show off my arms.

So I asked her, I said, "Okay, if you could learn right now, if I could wave a magic wand and you could just accept your butt and your arms the way they are without losing a single pound or magically having the cellulite disappear, like I'd change your brain and not your body, how would that change your life? If you could just wake up and be like, butt, arms, no problem."

And I asked her that question and she just looked at me, this blank look, she's like, "I don't understand what you're saying." And I'm like, oh my goodness, it was truly incomprehensible to her that loving a body with - and I'm using air quotes here, loving a body with "flaws" is possible.

She's like, no, it does not compute. I cannot imagine a world where I don't just hate what parts of my body look like. She literally was like, I don't understand what you mean by it's optional to love it or to hate it. She only saw that she had the option to think it was disgusting.

So I'm like, clearly I need to do a whole podcast on this. So here's the thing, my friends, no matter how much work you do to change your body, if you're like, I'm going to lift weights and build muscle, or I'm going to eat less and lose weight or whatever you decide you want to do to change your

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body, if you don't learn to just love it independently of what it looks like, you're just going to keep criticizing it when it's smaller. That's true.

So losing weight will give you a smaller body, but it will not give you a body free of stretch marks, free of loose skin, and all of that. So then you're going to be pissed because you're like, I did all that work to have this perfect body and it's still not perfect.

So it's really important for you to do body image work on yourself so if you decide that you want to change it for whatever reason, that you're not pinning your ability to love your body on making those changes. So if you can love your - and I'm using air quotes again - "flaws" now, when you take steps to change your body or if you decide to do that, you're going to be like, alright, well, now I have different flaws but I love them because I know how to love my flaws.

So with that set up, let's talk about what body image is and why I love talking about body image. Because here's the thing; when you can get past this belief that you have to look a certain way to feel good about your body, you've unlocked so much potential in yourself.

Because women, and I'm sure men do this as well, but I'm just talking to the ladies right now. Women get in their own way so freaking much because their thoughts are all wrapped up in thinking that they need to look better, they always need to be trying to look better, or they always need to be disguising their flaws.

We spend so much of our brain space trying to figure out how we can look better. I just want every woman on the planet to drop thinking that way so they can explode their own lives. Because think of how many times you look at your body throughout the day and how many thoughts are things like, I wish my belly wasn't so big, or look at the cellulite on my thighs.

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How many times do you think that per day? And if you could erase those thoughts and replace them with, how can I get myself through this workout, or I wonder if I could sign up for a marathon, with thoughts that are moving you forward, how powerful you would be.

So let's start from there. We waste so much mental energy criticizing ourselves about stupid shit about how our bodies look. And body image is a very interesting thing because it's so subjective. You could have a traditionally perfect body and still find fault with it. Did you know that?

You could also have a traditionally flawed body and think it's absolutely perfect. And perfect example of this is Lizzo. Have you ever looked at Lizzo's Instagram? She for sure does not have what most people would call a perfect body. This is not me saying her body's not perfect because I think her body is banging.

But other people, she's not a size eight or whatever. She's probably a size 20. And she doesn't fall into that category of perfect body, but she loves on herself so deeply. And there is this video of her on Instagram where she's just petting her belly and she's looking at it in the mirror and she's saying nice things to it, and I love this.

Because she's just like, "I love you so much belly." She's just really appreciating her body. And she's not, oh, I love my body despite its flaws. She's like, look at this body, look at it, come on. She's just in love with it. And I think that can be a little confusing to some people.

If you've spent your life believing you should always be striving to correct your body flaws, seeing somebody else with a body like yours, not really looking and seeing it as a flaw is sort of mind-blowing. But the concept that your body is a collection of flaws that need to be managed or improved or hidden is a fabrication of the diet and fitness industry so they can sell you stuff, seriously.

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So the first lesson that I want to teach you today, the first take-home message from this podcast, and if you can write this down, if you've got a place where you can write it down, please write it down. There's no such thing as a body flaw.

Let that sink in. There is no such thing as a body flaw. There is also no such thing as a perfect body. It's all subjective. We're just simply bodies with different characteristics. And while yes, you may have preferences for which characteristics you'd like to have, I want you to stop saying that the ones you have right now, whether it's cellulite or back fat or one eyebrow higher than the other, whatever it is, I want you to stop calling them flaws. They're not fucking flaws.

They're just the characteristics of your body. You're a collection of characteristics. That is all. Because when we say something is a flaw, we're implying that it's wrong, that it's bad, that it should be fixed. But your body is not something to be fixed. It's not broken in the first place.

For sure, you may have things about your body that you want to change, and I think that's totally normal. But if you stop referring to them as flaws, you're going to notice you have a lot less dislike for them. And seriously, you guys, cellulite is not a flaw. It's not a flaw. It's literally just how your skin and your collagen and your connective tissue and your fat come together to store energy for future use.

Smooth skin is literally no better, no more functional than bumpy skin. In fact, I'd argue that maybe the bumpy skin is more functional because that's how it evolved. But it's just different. Somewhere along the line, the media taught you that bumpy skin is a flaw but it's not.

So let's stop calling cellulite a body flaw please. Everybody has it, even supermodels, even Kim Kardashian. They just have somebody airbrushing every photo so it looks like they don't.

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So now that you're on board that there's no such thing as a body flaw, you are now released from ever saying I'm learning to love my body despite its flaws. Because if you don't have flaws, there's nothing to get over. So we're going to erase that phrase from our vocabulary.

There's no such thing as a body flaw so you will never ever have to say I want to learn to love my body despite its flaws. You're just learning to love your body, full stop, because you've got no flaws. You're just learning to love it.

And imagine, imagine you adopted a puppy and that puppy was missing an eye. Probably grew up in a puppy mill, got an infection, had to have the eye removed. You would never say, "I love this puppy despite her missing eye." You would never say that. You'd like be like, oh my god, the cutest puppy, love her so much, she's got all these little puppy wiggles and she's so cuddly and soft and I just can't get enough of her.

You don't love her despite her missing eye. You just love her. So that's how I want you to love your body. There's no flaws. You just love it. So here's what happens sometimes. Now, you think okay, I'm going to learn to love my body right now, but if I do that, I won't be motivated to change it.

And so two-part answer to this question. First is guess what, you can love your body and still want to change it. You can appreciate it and thank it for everything and say hey you're awesome, I wonder what it would be like if you were smaller or if you had more muscles in your arms or your legs or I wonder what it would look like if we had a tattoo.

That's love. That's love. I love you, you're awesome, I wonder what it would be like if we were a little bit different, let's see. It's so powerful to make changes to yourself from a place of love and curiosity and hey, I wonder what it would be like.

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And when you love your body, you take care of it. We don't abuse our bodies when we love them because you only get one. There's no backup body. Just the one. So when we really love ourselves, we're totally okay with changing the body, but we don't expect changing the body to make us love the body more. Because once you love your body, you're like, I can't possibly love you more, you're amazing, you're my body, you're the only one I get.

So of course I want to love you, right? So we can change it, we can say I changed it, I don't like this, I'm going to go back. We can do that too. We can think I wonder what's possible for me in this body, I wonder how well I could run if I took even better care of it. And that's a really fun place to be.

So if you decide you're going to love your body as is, it doesn't necessarily mean you're not going to want to change it. But you might decide not to change it. You might right now think if I change my body, if I lose weight, or if I gain muscle or whatever it is you want to do, then I'll be able to love my body more.

And you think that not loving your body is the motivation to change. But you might also learn to love your body as is and just say, you know what, I actually don't really care about changing it now. And with your brain right now thinking that the size of your body or the consistency of your skin is what gives you permission to love your body, I can see how that would be confusing.

But once you learn to love your body, you might say that's a lot of work to change it, I think I'm good, I'm just going to stay right here. And that's okay. When you make decisions about how to treat your body from a place of love and wanting to care for it, that is what matters.

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What you decide to do is your decision. You might decide to change it, you might decide it's just not important because your priorities have shifted and either way is perfect.

Now, I also know there are some of you thinking okay, yes, I get all of this intellectually and I'm totally on board, but I still don't want anyone to see my tummy or my loose skin or whatever it is. And this is where we're going to level up.

So when you are on board with loving yourself as is, it doesn't necessarily mean you want to show other people what your body looks like. That shame of oh, my body is something that I should be ashamed of, that's some deep-rooted stuff.

So as you're doing the work to learn to love your body, you might still be like, well, I love it but other people might not, so I don't feel ready yet to go outside in a tank top when I have arm fat, or whatever it is. So you can love your body enough to take awesome care of it, but also believe that the condition of your body means something about you.

And if your weight is higher than you want it to be, or you have loose skin or everything jiggles, which by the way, everybody jiggles, we all jiggle, even the size sixes jiggle somewhere. When we have these characteristics about our body, sometimes we believe other people are going to have opinions about us because of that.

And so I think it's important to really tell yourself, what do you think your body says about you? When you imagine exercising in front of other people, whether it's in your neighborhood or at the gym or at a race, what do you imagine people are thinking about you?

Because that right there, the opinions you think other people have, that's going to get in your way. So even if you clean up your thinking and get to a

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point where you're like, I love my body exactly as it is, I'm still focused on what other people think, there's still going to be a struggle point.

So loving your body isn't just accepting it as is. It's also understanding that nobody else's opinion about it matters. Unless you're a supermodel and your entire livelihood revolves around you maintaining your body in a specific way and if you don't, you lose your paycheck - first of all, if you're a supermodel, you've probably got some savings. I don't know.

But really, unless you're a supermodel, nobody else's opinion about your body matters. It just doesn't. When you skip a workout because you're imagining all the things that these other people are thinking about you, you're putting strangers in charge of your actions.

Really let that land. When you say I can't run outside because my neighbors might think I'm fat and lazy, you're basically saying okay neighbors, your opinion is more important than mine, you get to decide whether I exercise or not. I'm imagining that you would prefer not to see me out there so okay, I'm not going to exercise.

What is that? Stop it. And most of the time, these folks haven't even said a word. Or maybe they don't even see you. It's all in your mind. Or if they do say something, they're like, "Wow, I saw you out there running, you're so inspiring. I wish I could do that."

If you listen, you hear people saying that and you recognize that wow, while I'm beating myself up for looking "disgusting" in my workout clothes, somebody else sees me and says brave, inspiring, I wish I could do that. But back to the original premise here.

Most of the time, the people that you're imagining have these terrible opinions haven't said a word, it's just in your mind. So literally, strangers

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who haven't said a damn word are now in charge of whether or not you exercise. And I think that's wild.

When you put it that way, it's like oh, I really don't want to put strangers in charge of my life. I don't want to let them decide what I do. So let's dive into body image and how your body image impacts your exercise. Because I've just given you an example of how it can impact your ability to exercise.

And I think one of the biggest challenges with working out in front of other people is that there's this perception that workout gear is very revealing, which actually it's not. Because I'll tell you, workout gear is - I mean, it's revealing in the perspective that it's form fitting, but your boob is never going to pop out of a workout top or a sports bra the way it might if you're wearing a low-cut blouse at work or something like that.

Workout gear actually keeps you in place and in my opinion, makes you look thinner because it kind of sucks us in everywhere. That's just my opinion. But there's this perception that if I show up in Spandex, everybody's going to see my body.

And so we're already doing this physically challenging thing and we're feeling a little vulnerable, we've got some thoughts about that, and then on top of it, we're doing in clothing that makes us feel vulnerable. Because we're like, oh, I'm exposing myself in different ways.

And I know you guys can relate to this and I remember when I did my first triathlon, 2010, I was probably 240 pounds. A big girl, still a big girl. I was far in the way the fattest person there. And even though I had trained hard, I knew I could finish that race. I knew I was ready for it.

My brain almost shut down on me when I was waiting for my swim wave to start because I felt so vulnerable. All those super fit bodies, and there I was

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in Spandex, lots of exposed skin, and I just wanted to cry. Really, it was tough. It was not my most comfortable moment.

And it was like, have you ever had those dreams where you're naked and everyone can see you? And you're like, what am I going to do? I'm naked, everyone can see me, that's what it felt like. And there was nowhere to hide except the porta potties and nobody wants to hide in there because that's gross.

So I just had to stand around in my bathing suit. And what I noticed was that even though I was horrified to be in my swimsuit in front of all those people, none of them were looking at me. Because guess what? I was just another body in a bathing suit. No more, no less.

And so the longer I stood there, the easier it got. And it kind of blew my mind. I'm like, here I am sort of basically naked and everyone's just wandering around like it's normal. Like what? But guess what, it is.

So eventually I started talking to other people and there I am, just me in my bathing suit, them in their bathing suits, nothing left to the imagination, and I just had normal conversations with them like we were all fully clothed. It blew my mind.

And in that moment, I realized maybe my body image stuff is just a bunch of silliness made up by my brain. And I'm not going to say that magically I had no body image issues after that. Still had to work on it. And honestly, I still work on it on a daily basis.

I'm constantly refining and reminding because I've got all those shitty thoughts that still try to creep in every once in a while. But in that moment, I kind of started to - started on that path of like, wait, maybe this is an optional way of thinking.

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Because here's what happens when you believe your brain's bullshit stories about how you can't expose your "flaws." First of all, when you believe that, you have to go to great lengths to find workout opportunities that either keep you covered or keep you away from other people and this limits what you can do.

It means you can't go to the gym during normal hours, you can't do fun dance classes, you can't sign up for 5Ks. If you're like, people can't see me exercising because I look terrible, well then it really limits your opportunity to exercise. You got to go out and buy a really expensive Peloton so you can ride in your basement.

So that's one thing. Another thing is a lot of times, if your body image is getting in the way of your exercising, you give up on what you really want to do so that you're not uncomfortable. If you really want to do a triathlon but you can't get over the idea of appearing in a bathing suit in public, you're never going to be able to chase that dream.

And guess what? Instead of being uncomfortable in public in a bathing suit, you're uncomfortable because you're squelching your dreams. You're just trading one type of discomfort for another.

And then finally, you may be like, alright, I can work out outside, I can do the triathlon, I'm just going to cover myself up as much as possible. And so you overdress for your workouts, you're super uncomfortable physically the whole time because nothing fits right or you're chafing or you're just weighed down with all this extra clothing.

When I first started running, I'd wear these big baggy t-shirts that hung down to my knees and I was always overheated. And I wasn't fooling anyone. Nobody looked at me and said, "Huh, I'm sure that underneath that enormous triple X, triple 3X t-shirt, that she's a size six."

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No, I was just a fat girl wearing a poorly fitting t-shirt. I wasn't fooling anybody, it slowed me down, and what I had to learn when I first really started getting into fitness was that it's important for me to dress in gear that enhances my experience, that makes me a better athlete.

Gear that fits properly, meaning that it's not going to rub or chafe or get in my way, and when I started to wear stuff that actually fit me, I felt so much more confident in what my body could accomplish. And when that confidence was there, guess what?

What other people thought of my body became secondary. Their opinions do not get to decide whether I work out or not. I get to decide. Now, it doesn't happen overnight. It's definitely a process, and it starts with allowing yourself to feel a little uncomfortable about what you look like in exercise gear, whether you're jigglng or bouncing or your cellulite is showing through your tights.

Let yourself feel uncomfortable and do it anyway. Because my friends, your cellulite is the least interesting thing about you. Seriously. You are smart, you are funny, you are a kind person, you're a great mom, sister, friend, daughter, spouse. You have done some badass epic shit in your life.

Those are the things about you that matter. Your cellulite is just a characteristic, like the size of your ears or your feet. It's irrelevant. It's unimportant. It is not part of the equation.

You were not put on this earth to look good for other people. You were put on this earth to do amazing things. And you can't do those amazing things if your mind is focused on whether your ass is jigglng in your tights.

So here are some ways to start shifting your body image talk right now. And the first thing I want you to do is I want you to go on a cleanse. Not a green juice cleanse. I want you to go on an Instagram cleanse. Stop

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following all of those accounts with those “perfect” bodies. And start following Instagram account with women who look like you, with women who have bodies like you, doing epic shit.

There are some amazing Instagram accounts out there and when you start filling your feed with amazing, powerful women doing badass stuff, loving their bodies, appreciating themselves exactly as they are, and maybe even highlighting their “flaws,” or not going out of their way to disguise them, when you start filling your feed with that, you’re normalizing all bodies.

You’re no longer picking and choosing only the “inspirational” bodies because inspirational bodies are just bodies. The inspiration comes from what’s inside that person’s mind. So cleanse your Instagram of the stuff that’s reinforcing I need to be smaller, I need to be different so that I can feel good about myself and fill your feed with people who are already doing epic shit in the body they have right now. So that’s number one. Go on a cleanse.

Number two, I want you to go out of your way to appreciate your body parts, especially the ones that you think are flaws. I want you to wink at yourself in the mirror all the damn time. I want you to normalize looking at your belly and your butt and your arms and your back fat and just normalize it.

Don’t look in the mirror and go, “This is so gross.” And maybe that’s what you’re thinking right now but every time you see yourself in the mirror, and I want you to put yourself in the mirror a lot, I want you to look at yourself a lot. But every time you see yourself, I want you on purpose to say, “Oh look, there’s my belly. Oh look, those are my boobs.”

And we don’t criticize. We say okay, there they are. Neutralize it so that it’s not something that, oh gosh, I need to be ashamed of that. Okay, those are my boobs. I’m learning to accept them. You’ve got to practice this. If you

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avoid looking at yourself in the mirror, then when you do see yourself, you're going to be like, oh my god.

You're going to be like, look away, I'm hideous. No, you got to look at yourself all the damn time so that you get used to seeing yourself. And then you're not surprised. You're just like, oh look, there's my body. It's so powerful. So look at yourself all the damn time in the mirror. I want you to wink at yourself. I want you to slap yourself on the ass, I want you to flirt with yourself in the mirror. Please. Please do that.

Third thing is your outfit's job is not to make you look thinner. Especially your workout gear. Your outfit's job is to help you exercise better and to bring you joy. Your outfit's job is to fit you properly. If you try clothes on and they don't fit properly, those are not your clothes.

So wear clothing, especially workout gear that fits you. Wear clothes that take you a little bit out of your comfort zone too, or maybe a lot. I don't know. I just bought a crop top recently and I will tell you, when I wear it, I'm like, I'm very conscious of it.

And I'm striving to get to the point that I forget that I'm wearing a crop top in public. So wear clothes that take you a little bit out of your comfort zone and then watch your brain and coach yourself through it. And notice how the fashion police are actually not going to chase you down because they don't really exist.

So your outfit's job is to serve you. You are not there to fit into your clothes. Your clothes are there to fit you. Wear gear that works for you. Let's not cover up our arms on 100-degree day. Wear the tank top. Wear the proper clothing for the occasion and sometimes take yourself a little bit out of your comfort zone.

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And here's the thing that I want to leave you with. Nobody is actually looking at you. We think the whole world is staring at us, and I promise you they're not. They're really not. When you spend all your time thinking everybody's staring at me, and even if they are, you're putting strangers in charge of your actions.

So nobody's really looking at you. But if they are, remember that if you are visible, you have the opportunity to inspire someone else. And this is what the whole Not Your Average Runner organization is about. We want fat chicks to get out there and run in the bodies they have right now so that other fat chicks will see hey, maybe if it's okay for her, it's okay for me.

So if you are visible, you're going to inspire someone else. And then the last question I want to leave you with today is what would be different about your life if you weren't focused on your flaws? What would you be capable of? What could you accomplish if all the energy that you spent on thinking about how you need to be different so that you can love your body, if you erased all that energy and moved it over to something else, what would be different about your life?

Would you be in more pictures with your family? Would you do more stuff outside the house? Would you do those things that you've always thought oh, that sounds like fun but I don't want people looking at me? What would you do? How would you show up? How would your life change if you weren't constantly thinking about what your body looks like?

And if the answer is wow, my life would be totally different, I want you to try and do the work that I taught you today in this podcast. Alright my rebellious friends, that's it for today. I want you to go sign up for the Rebel Runner Roadmap right now. We start on April 26th. Go to rebelrunnerroadmap.com.

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If you're already a runner, you're still going to get a lot out of the Roadmap because we do a lot of the mental work in that class. Go get it. 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.