

Ep #246: How to Recover from Injury Without Losing Your Sh*t



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With Your Host

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, runners, what is up? I'm wondering where you are right now? Like, are you out running or walking, or maybe you're driving to work? I think it is so fun that we get to spend this time together. And I want you to know how much I appreciate you inviting me into your life each week. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.

Now, this week I'm talking about something that I think quite literally every single runner can relate to. Whether you are an Olympian or a brand new beginner, at one point or another in your running life you're going to have to take time off from running due to injury or illness, there's pretty much no exceptions to this.

And it can be kind of challenging to manage that because most of us rely on running, at least partially, for our mental health and stress relief. And I mean, yeah, the self-coaching model and thought work are awesome, always do your thought work. But sometimes, you just got to go out and pound the pavement to give yourself a reset. And when your doc tells you that you can't run for a few weeks, or maybe even months, well, it can be pretty devastating.

And I was actually on the Doc On The Run Podcast recently talking about this exact thing and I realized it's something I've never discussed here on my own show. So this week we're going to talk about how you can take some of the stress and frustration out of injury recovery. And it's basically a three step process.

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Now, step one is to track your pain, your discomfort, your range of motion, your strength, any of those indicators of healing. Start tracking them when you first have symptoms and then keep going throughout the healing process.

So, for example, if you have knee pain start keeping track of when and where it happens and the intensity of the pain. Like on a scale of zero to 10, where zero is I'm not even aware of that body part and 10 is can somebody please amputate my leg, right? Like that level of pain. So track the intensity of the pain, but also when and where it happens. And by where I mean, where on your body? And when, I mean, like what are you doing when it happens?

So does it only happen when you're going downstairs? Or maybe it happens when you're going upstairs. Or only when you're wearing a certain pair of shoes. Only when you're running. I mean, do you start your run okay, and then by the end your knee hurts? Or does your runs start out with some pain, but then after you warm up the knee pain goes away?

Where exactly on your knee does it hurt? Is it above or below the kneecap? Or is it behind the kneecap? Is it on the inside or the outside? Becoming aware of exactly where you feel your pain, I've even circled it on my leg or my knee. Like when I've had knee pain in the past I've circled the spot with a sharpie and gone to the doctor with a sharpie on my knee to say this is where it hurts.

But becoming aware of every type of movement and just all of the general circumstances around the experience of the pain. And also if your normal range of motion is limited, like maybe you can't bend your knee as much as you used to, and again, I'm using knees as an example. Gathering all of this data is going to help you and your doctor assess what's going on.

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And you can use the cues that I just gave you if you're having hip pain, or foot pain, or ankle pain, or anywhere in your body. Okay? And it is super important to do this right in the beginning when you first start noticing the symptoms for two reasons. The first is, like I just said, so you can help your doctor figure out what the problem is or help your physical therapist figure it out.

In the example above, if I go to the doc and I say, "I don't know, my knee hurts when I run," It doesn't give her very much to go on. And I mean that knee pain while running could be any of like 10 different things from osteoarthritis to a torn meniscus, to a bakers cyst, all of which have wildly different treatment plans. So the more data you can gather and provide, the better.

But also, taking those detailed notes at the start of an injury, and even rating your pain on a scale of zero to 10 or one to 10, it really helps you see if you're making progress on your recovery or not. So keep track of it, not just at the beginning, but throughout your recovery. Maybe even once a week you do like a little mini assessment and say, "Okay, here's where all of my injury markers are today." And like keep track of it once a week. Be a scientist and study yourself.

So that's step number one. Step number two is to track your recovery in the same level of detail as you track your training, okay? So I know most of you, you'll either have a Garmin or a RunKeeper, and you go out and you know to the second how long you ran, how far you ran, you know your heart rate. You know so much about every single run, you know every single day you ran, you know what other stuff you did.

And most of you actually have a training calendar and on your calendar, it's like, these are the days I'm going to run, and here's how far I'm going to

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run. And these are the days I'm going to strength train. And this is when I'm cross training, And this is when I'm resting, and this is when I'm getting a massage, right?

I want you to go after your recovery the same way. All right? Create a schedule, get like a big calendar to write it on, or create a spreadsheet. I'm a big fan of Google Sheets for stuff like this. But create something where you can plan out, you can schedule out and then check off and keep track of every single activity.

And that includes visits to your doctor, visits to your physical therapist, your massage therapist, I don't know, your acupuncturist, your podiatrist, whoever you see to help you recover from an injury and maintain your running health. So this calendar should include all of the visits that you make to your professionals. And then also any of the physical therapy and stretching that you do on your own.

And the amount of rest you get, right? Like how much are you sleeping? Any fitness activities that your doctor prescribes, and maybe that's okay, instead of running three days a week I'm going to do pool running three days a week. Or instead of running three days a week I'm going to hit the bike, maybe it's the recumbent bike three times a week, or I'm going to do yoga instead. Whatever your doctor says, "This is what I recommend you do," make sure you do it, you schedule it out.

And here's the thing, if you're not running because you're injured, you're suddenly going to have some time in your schedule, right? It's not like that stuff, that time magically goes away if you're not running. You've got that time now available to devote to your recovery, okay?

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So the reason it is so important for you to schedule and track your recovery activities the same way you would track your training is, first of all, it gives you and your recovery team a clear picture of exactly what's working and what isn't. All right? So if you are four weeks into recovery and you're not really improving as expected, you and your physical therapist or your doctor can look at your calendar and see why.

Now, if she prescribed twice weekly physical therapy plus daily stretches to do at home, and you're only doing about half of that, it will probably explain why you're not improving at the rate expected. But if you're doing every single thing exactly as prescribed and you're not getting better, this is going to help your doctor and you decide if maybe a different treatment plan is required.

So the more information you can collect, the better decisions that you can make. And then you can also see where there might be gaps in your treatment. You might say, "Oh, all right, well, I'm actually missing out on, you know, I could be taking Epsom salt baths once a week or something to help with recovery," and so forth.

So there's a lot of information you can gain by writing down everything you've done so that you can kind of look at it with an objective eye. And also bring your professionals in and say, "Okay, this is what I'm doing, and these are the results we're getting, does everything add up or do we need to be switching things around?" So the more information you can collect, the better decisions you can make, and the faster you're going to get better.

And the second reason to do this kind of tracking on your recovery is because it gives your brain something to focus on, right? So think back to maybe a big race that you were so excited about and you got out all the

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post-it notes and all of the planners and everything and you got it all in your calendar and it was so fun to plan out that training.

You can plan out your recovery the same way, okay? And now, there's not necessarily an endpoint to your recovery the way there is to a race. But if you can kind of bring that energy to it and say, "Okay, where am I going to fit in my daily stretches? Where am I going to fit in my daily PT homework? Where am I going to make physical therapy appointments?" Right? All of those things.

If you can bring the energy of restraining to planning your recovery, first of all, it takes your mind off the fact that you're not running because it gives you something else to work towards. And also, you're taking an active role in your recovery at this point, instead of just waiting for it to be better. You're saying, "Okay, what can I do on a daily basis to move my recovery forward?"

Because think about all the times in your life where you've said, "Oh gosh, I hope I get better." And then you haven't done anything. How many times have you magically recovered from whatever it was? Probably zero or not very much higher than zero, okay? So when you get involved and you take an active role, this puts you in the driver's seat, it helps you feel empowered instead of powerless.

And when you feel empowered, you're going to be taking a lot more actions to bring yourself back to where you want to be instead of being like, "I don't know, I'm supposed to rest so I'm just going to hang out on the couch over here with a bottle of wine." So, on this schedule or this spreadsheet I want you to make sure that you're including the information that you're collecting about your pain levels as well from step number one. So give yourself that total picture of how things are going.

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Now, the final step is to do lots of thought work around your injury because I know it is so tempting to wallow and think, “Oh my gosh, I'm losing so much fitness, I'm losing so much time. This is a setback.” But the truth is most running injuries occur because either you have a muscular imbalance or weakness that gets exacerbated when you run and creates an injury. Or you're over training, which a lot of new runners do.

Running is a repetitive motion sport, weakness or imbalance can cause your gait to be off a little bit. And then when you keep hundreds of thousands of steps on top of that, an injury is going to emerge. So when it happens, my friend, it is actually not a setback. It was always going to happen, you just didn't know it.

So an injury is an opportunity to fix whatever the glitch is so you can come back stronger. And it's also a great time to evaluate if we've been doing too much, okay? A healthy running schedule includes rest days and strength training days. If you are running six days a week with no strength training, you are going to get injured.

If you're strength training for an hour, five times a week and running for an hour, five times a week and taking zero rest days, you're probably going to get injured, okay? There is such a thing as too much. And if you are not taking the time off that your body needs for recovery, it will take that time for you.

So one way to reframe your thinking about recovery is to decide that the time each day that you would have spent running or going to the gym is now the time you're going to spend on recovery. Okay, give your body as much attention to your physical therapy, as you do to your training. And that workout time when you're not running is also a great time to double down on your thought work.

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So notice when your brain starts to drift off into this space of, “Oh, it's not fair, I'm losing so much fitness. I'll never get across the finish line at this rate.” Notice how you feel when you think those thoughts, right? You feel discouraged, disempowered, frustrated. And when you're feeling that way, because you're thinking it's not fair are you giving the attention to your recovery that you need to? Or are you finding reasons to skip your PT homework or even sneaking out to run even though you know it's going to slow things down.

Your thinking is your most powerful tool right now. And if you want the result of coming back even stronger, you got to take the actions of following your doctor's orders, getting lots of rest, and not running before you are cleared. And all of that means you're going to have to feel calm and confident, not disempowered and full of self-pity.

So to be feeling calm and confident, you're going to need to be thinking some version of, “You know what? Injuries happen and if I follow instructions and take exceptional care of my body right now, I will come back stronger than before.”

Okay, so just to recap, your three steps to keeping your shit together while you're injured are number one, keep track of where you feel pain, how intense it is, and when you feel it. Number two, plan and track all of your recovery activities. And number three, work on your thoughts about the whole situation.

Now to help you with step number two I've actually made you a simple recovery tracker. It's a one page printout that you can download if you go to the show notes of this episode. So, again, if you want a pre-made recovery tracker to keep track of all of your activities I made you one, and just head over to the show notes for this episode and you can download it.

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Okay, runners, what did you think of today's episode? If this has been helpful for you, I would love it if you would share it on Instagram. Let people know about it. And of course, as always, I love you. Stay safe and get your ass out there and run

Hey, real quick before you go, if you enjoyed listening to this episode you have got to check out Up And Running. It's my 30 day online program that will teach you exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you have always wanted to be. Head on over to notyouraveragerunner.com/upandrrunning to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.