

Ep #250: 7 Challenges Larger Runners Face and How To Get Past Them



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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, I am so happy to be here with you today. What are we doing together today? Are we running? Are we walking, driving, chilling on the couch petting a cat? You know all of that is good with me. And today is episode 250, and whoa.

I'm blown away by this, the show actually passed the 2 million download mark a few weeks ago, now we're at 250 episodes and I am just so tickled that we are still here having fun together and that we still have lots to talk about. And honestly, that that many people are out there wanting to know how to be a runner in a larger body. It is just so fucking amazing.

So in honor of that, this week I want to talk about some of the challenges that fat runners face because somehow in the past 249 episodes I've never actually said, "Hey, when you're fat and a runner there are some actual things that you will need to deal with." And I wouldn't call them barriers, more like situations to be handled so that you can be the runner you want to be. So that you're not constantly plagued with injuries, or chafing, or, you know, your own brain.

Now, if you are not a runner yet, and by the way, I'm kicking off a beginners running class on June 1st. It's called Up and Running and it's going to help you start safely. You can learn more about it at notyouraveragerunner.com/upandrunning. And so if you're not a runner yet, today's episode is basically a list of things to consider and maybe even get

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in place before you start. And I promise, it's going to be way easier than you think, okay? All right, let's go.

Now, number one, the first challenge that a larger or heavier body has to contend with in running is the ground reaction force, okay? And that is, just it's simple physics. According to Newton's third law every action has an equal and opposite reaction. You probably learned that in 8th grade science. So when we exert force on the ground during running, an equal and opposite force is exerted on us by the ground.

And basically, that means when you weight more you exert more of a force on the ground and therefore there is a greater force exerted back on your body when you run. That is the circumstance of it, but before you sit there and say, "Well then I guess I'm just too fat to run because there's going to be so much force exerted on my body by the ground. I weigh too much, I'm going to get injured." Let's just take a moment, all right?

I want to talk about Usain Bolt because he is one of the fastest runners in the world and he weights like 207 pounds, right? And he's a sprinter, which means he's actually like, you know, he's pretty muscular. But most sprinters weight in the neighborhood of, I don't know, 160 pounds, maybe. And this dude is like, what's that? 25% more, 30% more weight than the average sprinter. So he's hitting the ground with a lot more force than the "average" runner.

Also, dude is fast as fuck, okay? And his joints seem to be doing just fine. Now, yes, he is a sprinter and not a distance runner, but the point here is that the mass of your body isn't actually what determines your success as a runner. There are a lot of other factors like strength training and running form. And those are factors that you have control over effective immediately, okay?

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So while yes, as a heavier runner you do have more of a ground reaction force to contend with, but that doesn't mean you have to limit you as a runner, okay?

So, with running form, I said there was two things you have control over right now, strength training and running form. With running form you want to make sure that your foot is contacting the ground mid-foot first, not heel first, okay?

This allows your muscles to absorb the impact instead of your joints, okay? And then your muscles absorb the impact, absorb that ground reaction force and return it back into your body in the form of energy that helps propel you forward, instead of going and just creating pain in your joints.

And working on pushing off hard with your back foot, right, so your front foot is the one that's landing, you want to land mid foot, right? That's the middle of your foot, not with your heel, and that absorbs the impact. And then with the back foot you want to be pushing off really hard. And there's that strength that comes into play, right?

So we talked about strength training and running form, strength training helps you become a stronger runner because it's helping you push off harder with that back foot. The harder you push off with the back foot, the more time you spend in the air, right, and the less time you spend in contact with the ground. Time in the air means time moving without any ground impact, okay?

So we actually cover running form and strength training in Up and Running, the class that I mentioned earlier. So if you want help with those things, I would love to have you in this class, and I will even review video of your running form and give you pointers if you want.

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Now another challenge that a larger bodied person, and in this case I am actually specifically referring to somebody who is fat versus somebody who is you know, Usain Bolt 207 pounds of muscle, right? Or like the Rock, another person who, I mean by the BMI charts, the Rock is obese, right? And none of us would look at him and choose that as a word. But for this one, this particular challenge is for larger bodied people who identify as fat, okay? And this is in the area of strength training.

And now it's not what you think, in no way am I saying if you are fat that strength training is going to be harder for you, okay? But the reality of living in a fat body in a society that is very fat phobic is that you might have beliefs about yourself, whether you belong in a space like a gym, or whether you deserve to work with a trainer. And then there's also the reality of just being a fat person in a fat phobic society where people are just going to want to tell you to lose weight to solve all your problems.

And I cannot tell you how many trainers I worked with back in the day that took one look at me and either assumed I was there for weight loss or that I would be weak. That pisses me off more than anything. Or that when I said, "Hey, this exercise is uncomfortable for me because, I don't know, my boobs or my belly are in the way," they would just have me do something completely different instead of figuring out a modification for that move. That happened to me a lot, so I get it.

And when you feel misunderstood, or shamed, or unwelcome in a space, it is tough to make that strength training a priority. Which means that you might avoid it which increases your chance for injury. And as we discussed above, it alters your running form.

So a great solution to this is to find a coach, or a trainer, or even an online self-delivered program that is experienced in working with larger bodied

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folks and understands that not only is weight loss not everybody's goal, but also that telling somebody to lose weight to make things easier for themselves is misleading and oftentimes wrong. Okay?

So you want to look for a coach, or a trainer, or a program that can help you with modifications of various moves to accommodate, say, a belly or boobs that might be in the way, right? And I always say this to my trainer whenever she has me, and she actually doesn't do it as much anymore. But sometimes she would put me in a position where I would say I'm being choked by my boobs, right? Like literally I feel like I can't breathe.

And then she'd like, "Oh, okay, here's how we can modify it so you can still do this move without feeling like you're being suffocated." All right? I know you guys know what I mean. So look for somebody like that who's going to help you with modifications, who can help you become strong and fit in the body that you have right now, okay?

And obviously, if you want to make weight loss a goal I totally understand, right? I know that a lot of you do have that as a goal, 100% your decision. But while you're on that path, focus on taking care of your current body, rather than fantasizing about how life is going to be so much easier in the future, okay?

And this doesn't need to be an in person trainer or coach, right? There are lots of trainers that work online. My trainer works online, she lives in Queens, I live in Philly. You can sign up for an online program like Up and Running that's actually meant for larger bodied women and can give you guidance to get started.

But the bottom line here is that strength training is for everyone. And honestly, if you're plus size it might even be more important for you

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because it's going to help you avoid injury. It's also going to help you build that confidence in yourself. And you may have lots of thoughts about not being comfortable doing it, or not deserving to have a coach or a trainer, or feeling awkward in the weight room of your gym.

And I really want you to work on those beliefs. Because A, they are not helping you, and B, they're just wrong. You deserve to be in the gym. You deserve to take up space. You deserve to have a coach or a trainer help you achieve your goals. And you deserve to have respect for the body that you have right now, okay?

All right, challenge number three, I don't know, I think we've all experienced this. I've experienced it many times, it's the look. You know what I mean. when you get the look, okay. You're out there running and somebody just kind of looks at you in disbelief, right?

Or you tell someone you're a runner and then there's that quick sort of, and they don't even know that they're doing it, it's a like up and down body scan. They're verifying like, yes, you are fat and yes, you just said you're a runner. And they just sort of stare at you in confusion. Or this is my favorite, they tilt their head to the side and they say good for you.

Now, if it has not happened to you yet, it will, I promise. It's just part of being a fat runner. And the other comments that you're going to get from people, it's going to happen, are, "Oh, keep up the good work, that weight is going to melt right off." Please, stop. Anything but that.

Now you might feel annoyed when this happens, I sometimes feel annoyed when this happens. You might feel embarrassed, you might even feel a healthy dose of righteous indignation. And all of those totally normal reactions. But here's the thing, when you spend any amount of time in that

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place of just being mad, or indignant, or embarrassed, it's not going to help you achieve your goals, okay?

People are going to people. We're humans, we make mistakes. We've all been raised in the same society that believes that thin is better and that fat people should just always be trying to lose weight, okay? So we're going to forgive the people for being people.

And, you know, sometimes they just don't know what to say. Sometimes they're legitimately confused, they're like, "Wait, I was taught that runners are thin, but you're fat. And you're telling me you're a runner." And you can see them doing the math in their head and just struggling with it, right? And so they're just confused.

Sometimes they're legit rude. Some people are assholes. This is also a circumstance. Some people are assholes, I like to say. But often they've just been conditioned in that same fat phobic society as you. Which means they probably believe that it is impossible to be both fat and healthy, or fat and athletic, and that everyone's goal is to be thin, as thin as possible, and that somehow being thin is morally better, right?

We've been conditioned to believe that since we were born. Some of us, right, some of us are a little farther down the path have realized like, oh, maybe none of that is true, but not everybody. Okay? And so when I have one of those people speak to me I just assume they're confused.

Like when my landlord, our new landlord had to come over and check on something in the basement. And he's like, "Oh, your husband's gym down there is really awesome." And I'm like, "Oh, that's my gym. Isn't it great?" Right? Enough said. There's no need for me to get snarky or educate him

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on the evils of the patriarchy, right? I just correct him, it's my gym, isn't it awesome? And move on. Okay?

And you can do the same with people. Because when you get all wrapped up in how annoying other people are in their attitudes towards fat folks exercising you're taking away a lot of energy from your own goals, right? You're spending all this thought energy on other people's shitty opinions when you could actually just be like, "I'm just going to put my head down and keep moving forward." All right?

And totally, correct people if necessary, but please then just move on and let it go. Because wallowing in your anger and your frustration hurts nobody else but you. It keeps nobody else but you from moving forward. So run it off and move on.

All right, you ready for number four? The struggle is real, my friends, chafing. And yes, people of all sizes chafe. And honestly, every single one of these seven challenges that fat people face running, thin people face them too. But I want to address them from the perspective of a fat person so that we're all on the same page here.

But number four, chafing, okay? People of all sizes chafe, it's not just a fat person thing. But I think it happens more often to us because we have more skin for it to happen to, right? It's literally just a numbers game. And if it does get bad enough, it can keep you on the couch. And that's not what I want for you.

So chafing is simply what happens when skin rubs on skin or when fabric rubs on skin and there's like moisture, like sweat, and humidity and heat, and the skin just gets red and raw. And some people call it chub rub. So most women understand what this is, right, when you wear a skirt and you

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don't have like little shorties on underneath and your thighs get all chafed up. It's like that, but in other places on your body as well.

Now, fortunately, it's actually a pretty easy fix. So the first thing you want to do is wear running gear that fits you properly, not too big, not too small. Make sure you wear shorts, and when I say shorts I mean running tight shorts. Not like those big billowy shorts that you see people wear or the like super short, short running shorts that we all had to wear in the 80s in gym class.

Make sure your shorts go past the parts of your thighs that touch so that you've actually got something keeping your thighs from rubbing against each other. I highly recommend wearing something with spandex or Lycra because they are going to move with you, they are not going to get eaten by your crotch. They will reduce friction and they will honestly make your running life so much better, okay?

And then you also want to combine that with Body Glide or another anti-chafe product on any areas of your body that are still prone to chafing, like maybe under your bra band, or for me it's often like the inside of my upper arm, the waistband of my tights, right? So wherever you tend to be prone to chafing you can use Body Glide or another anti-chafe product.

And if you still need extra protection, a heavier barrier over that, you can try a stick on product, like maybe a band aid or moleskin if you have like specific spots that you're like the Body Glide is not going to be enough for this area.

All right, number five. Challenge number five is sort of related to number four, it's jiggling, okay? And again, there are thin people who jiggle, right? Fat people, we got a little more, we got a little more going on. And it's a real

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thing. If you have boobs, or a butt, or a belly, or if you've lost a bunch of weight and you have loose skin, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Now for your boobs, motion control sports bra is what you need. And I highly recommend the Enell Sport, there will be a link in the show notes, and I think I have a free shipping code. If you go to the Enell website, it's enell.com, and use the code JILLSHIP in all caps when you check out I think you'll get free shipping.

But I highly recommend the Enell sports bra because it is meant for women of a C or D cup or higher. I'm a 42 H depending on the day, I wear Enell and it basically keeps the bounce of my boobs to a minimum. And it's so much more comfortable than wearing two sports bras or some of the other ones that are a little bouncier.

But for everything else, for the butt, for the belly, for everything else there's really only one solution, and that is compression gear. Now when I say compression gear I'm not talking about those like Ace bandage type things that they wrap your ankle in when you sprain it to keep it from swelling, right?

I'm talking about running or fitness gear that has some compression type fabric in it, and usually that's because it's got Lycra or spandex. And the higher the percentage of Lycra or spandex, right, the more compression you're going to have. And what that does is it kind of like compresses your flesh and keeps everything tight. And it can be really cute too, by the way.

My all-time favorite gear to keep my belly in check is Superfit Hero Tights. Okay, and we'll have a link in the show notes for that as well. Superfit Hero. They are high-waisted, they are super high quality, they have big pockets on the sides and they keep the jiggle to a minimum. So they're a little

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pricier but I love them because they last forever. You can also find tons and tons of great cost effective compression options at like Old Navy, Target, and Kohl's.

Now, I know that spandex might sound a little scary, especially if you were raised to believe that you should be camouflaging your flaws, but I promise you, it's going to make running so much easier. And if you need help with how to kind of get past your mental discomfort with that, check out episode 247 that I did with Judith Gatton a few weeks ago where we dive into all things spandex and all things thoughts about spandex.

All right, challenge number six is pacing and breathing. And again, this is a challenge that all new runners face, but I want to address it here anyway. And the thing is that most people, when they start running they believe that it's all about running as fast as you can and not taking walk breaks because that's cheating. Both of those beliefs are incorrect, all right?

So when you first start running if you try to go as fast as you can, you're going to get out of breath fast, okay? And then trying to push yourself to keep going as far as possible without a walk break means you're going to struggle to make progress because your body just isn't there yet, okay?

So I want to give you some advice here on how to fix this problem, okay? And the first thing is slow the fuck down, okay? Going as fast as you can go is called sprinting, you are not a sprinter. And by the way, sprinters don't run very far. Like, yeah, they're fast, but nobody sprints a half marathon, you run at a comfortable pace that you can maintain for a few hours, rather than something you can only maintain for a few minutes.

So sprinting is out, we're not sprinting, we're just going to run. We're going to run, sometimes some people might even call it a jog. And if you slow

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down to that kind of a pace, your breathing will immediately get easier. And you're going to practice at that slower pace until it feels easy, and then you're going to be speeding up. And by the way, if you're doing your strength training, that's going to make you faster as well without being super out of breath.

And then the other piece of this is to take walk breaks, and this is a legit way to be a runner. All right, lots of professionals do it. I teach about it in detail in the Up and Running course. Actually, I teach you all about breathing, and pacing, and taking walk breaks, how to do them strategically so that you can get more for your run. I teach about that in my Up and Running course that such starts on June 1st. So if this is your struggle, make sure you join that class.

And the final challenge I'm going to cover today, number seven, is believing in yourself. This is the big one, this is the big kahuna here. It is probably the biggest challenge you'll ever face, maybe not even just with running but elsewhere in your life with whatever you're struggling.

Because when you question whether you're good at something, whether you can do it, whether you might fail. When you think thoughts like, oh, I'm too fat to be a runner, or I'm too slow, or I'm too old, or I have no business trying to run. Well guess what? You are going to feel ashamed, and embarrassed, and discouraged. And nobody takes action from that place.

Now, the good news here is that you actually don't need to lose weight, you don't need to be less of a larger bodied person to believe that you can be a runner. It is just a matter of working on the thoughts you have about yourself. And it really is that simple because your thoughts drive your feelings and your feelings drive your actions.

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So if you're thinking to yourself, this is totally something I can figure out, you will feel optimistic and maybe even motivated. And from there, you will take the action of running, because our thoughts drive our feelings and our feelings drive our actions. But if you are thinking, I'm going to be so bad at this, you will feel discouraged and you probably won't take the action of starting.

So that's the good news okay? You can change how you think about yourself. And that's going to lead you to becoming a runner. The less great news is that it takes practice.

And I don't want to call it bad news because everything in life that we want to master takes practice, so this is not rocket science. But if you have spent years talking smack to yourself about your body or your athletic abilities, it is going to take a little work and practice to turn that boat around, that's all.

And I do, again, I teach that whole process and Up and Running as well because running is more than just putting one foot in front of the other. It is creating that runner's identity that will keep you coming back over and over and over again. That is the real secret sauce.

Okay, my friends, I hope today was helpful for you. And, of course, if you loved it, please share it on Instagram. And if you heard that thunderclap that just happened outside my window, that's your sign to share it on Instagram. And also make sure you join Up and Running for the June class because I'm going to help you address every single one of the challenges that we talked about in this show.

We start on June 1st, we will spend the whole month of June working on your running, getting you the confidence and the motivation to become a runner. It's going to be amazing. Just go to

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notyouraveragerunner.com/upandrinning to register. I hope I get to meet you in this class. And if you joined because of this episode I want to know, all right? And one more time, that link is notyouraveragerunner.com/upandrinning.

And as always, I love you, stay safe, and get your ass out there and run. I'll see you next week.

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/upandrinning to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.