

Ep #270: How to Make The First Mile Easier



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Jill Angie

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Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you've never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you are in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, your fat running coach. I help fat women over 40 to start running, feel confident, and change their lives. I have worked with thousands of women to help them achieve their running goals and now I want to help you.

Hey runners, so today we're talking about something very important. And that is the first mile of your run and how it feels like ass most of the time. Now, my new students right now in Up And Running are doing about a mile or so in their first few run/walk workouts. And there's always people who are like, "Does this get easier? Because it feels really hard."

And what they don't know is that the first mile actually always feels tough. It always feels more difficult. So it's not a strange thing. It's not that something has gone wrong, right? This is how the body works. But I'm here today to break down the reasons why that happens and give you some ways to handle it.

So there's actually nothing magical about that first mile. And for some people it's more than a mile, for other people it's less. For me it's actually about the first 15 minutes. And sometimes that's more than a mile, sometimes that's less than a mile depending on how I'm running that day.

And actually I should clarify that, the first minute usually feels fine until my brain and body realize what's happening. And then everything kicks in during that second minute. So minute number one is great, minutes two through 15 suck and then things get better. But whatever it is, I want you to know that you're not alone because most runners don't just get up and start running and feel like gazelles, right?

No matter whether you are a five minute miler or a 25 minute miler, that's just the way the body works, right? There is a lag time before running starts

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to feel a little more comfortable. And I think this is a great thing to know because it means instead of beating yourself up for how your run feels in that first mile, your inner bully can kind of take a backseat because that's actually how it's supposed to be.

So one more time for the people in the back, the first mile is supposed to be hard pretty much every time.

Now there are a few different reasons for that. The first is simply human physiology, okay? It takes time for your body to adapt to the change from being at rest to doing the work of running. Your heart needs to start beating faster to circulate your blood. Your blood needs to start circulating faster to supply your muscles with oxygen. And your lungs need to start pulling in more oxygen to give to the blood. Okay, that means you're starting to breathe harder, and your heart rate is going up.

And this whole system takes time to go from rest to running. And until you get your heart rate up high enough and your breathing up high enough to provide enough oxygenated blood to support running, it's going to feel difficult because your muscles like literally are starving for oxygen in the moment. They don't have enough supply quite yet to run.

This is why it's so important to warm up by walking for at least five minutes, okay? Don't ask your body to go from zero to 60 right away. I mean, you can, but it's going to suck and it's actually going to take longer overall to get to the part where it feels good.

And years ago, I had this client who hated doing her warm up. And every time we talked she'd say, "I just don't have five minutes to go for a walk before I run. I just need to get to the run and get it done." And one day I said, "All right, fine, just try it once and see what happens. Let's just see."

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And you know what? The next time we talked she was a convert because when she did that five minute warm up, she was actually able to run faster when she started running. So she ended up saving time. She actually covered more ground in less time by doing a warm up. And she didn't have shin splints, and her first mile was a lot less uncomfortable than usual. Okay, so that's the power of a warm up.

And a warm up is simply a brisk walk for at least five minutes. It means that your body is going to be much more ready for the effort of running when you start that first interval. Some of you might need a longer warm up and that's okay, everyone's different. But make sure you include it.

Now, the second reason that your run feels hard in the beginning is because your brain is a little bit forgetful, okay? Bet you did not know that, right? Not. But even though the first 20 minutes of each run is hard every single time, or the first mile or whatever it is for you, every single time it's hard and then you start to feel better, your brain doesn't remember it the next time.

So that means that you do your warm up, you start your intervals, it feels hard and your brain is immediately, "What is happening? Stop this torture, we can't do this." And that's where you need to step in and just remind yourself, this happens every single time. This is just the part where it feels like ass, and in about 15 or 20 minutes you're going to get a hit of endorphins and it's all going to be okay. Maybe just write that in Sharpie on the back of your hand, so you don't forget it.

Now, you also can tell yourself that you can quit after a mile if it doesn't start to feel better. Just say "Listen, let's go a mile, see what happens. And then you can quit if it doesn't feel better." But you got to stick with it long enough to get past that lag time. And then you can decide if you want to stop.

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And I mean, this is kind of a brain hack, right? Because once you're warmed up, you're probably not going to want to stop. So you're totally tricking your brain. But I think that's fair because your brain pranks you all the time. So it's even Steven, right?

And in case that you think that your brain forgetting running is hard for the first mile or so is just a newbie thing, I still have those thoughts at the beginning of every single run. I've been a runner since 1997, my friends. Sometimes my mind even suggests that I have forgotten how to run.

Seriously, I legit have the thought, "What if I can't get my legs to move?" at least once or twice a week. It sounds ridiculous, right? But brains are pretty ridiculous sometimes. So I just laugh and I say, "All right, maybe my legs won't remember how to move, but let's just see what happens."

So, my friends, what you tell yourself about that first mile is actually really important, okay? If you beat yourself up about it it's going to suck more. It's not going to be fun. And you're arguing against reality. If you tell yourself, "Oh, this is just normal. This is part of my run, the first 15 minutes is when I have all the conversations about how it's hard and I want to quit. And in about 15 minutes I'm going to feel fine." What you tell yourself about that first mile matters.

Now, let's talk about the third reason, which is my favorite reason that the first mile or so feels kind of shitty. It's because your endorphins haven't kicked in yet, right? So you are feeling all the discomfort and stress of running.

Now, real quick, what are endorphins? Well, they're basically the body's version of morphine, morphine light. But essentially they're hormones that the body produces when it senses pain or stress. And there are actually like 20 different kinds of endorphins in the body. And their function is to block pain signals so that you can function, all right?

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It takes a hot minute for your body to decide, oh, do we need the endorphins? Do we not need the endorphins? Are we going to be only running for a minute or two? In which case, let's hold on to the endorphins. Oh, it's five minutes, it's 10 minutes, yeah, maybe we need to release the endorphins, right?

So that's another reason that the first mile feels like ass, is because your body is kind of trying to decide is this a continuous state that we're going to be in, this running? Or is this just a short burst of activity and we don't need to worry about it? But once they're released, right, once they're circulating around your body, you start to relax a bit and running feels a lot easier. Well, maybe not a lot easier, but a little bit easier. And you start to kind of unclench and just relax into it.

And I know that a lot of people talk about the runner's high, okay, which is related to endorphins. And you might be thinking, "Well, you know what, I don't get a runner's high. I've never felt that endorphin boost." The first thing I want you to know is that you have felt the endorphin boost if you're a mile or so into your run and it starts to feel easier. That's literally what's going on. Your body is warmed up, the endorphins have kicked in, and they're starting to kind of block and manage some of those pain signals.

But also, the runner's high isn't what most people think, right? Like, yes, a few folks get a light euphoric feeling while running, and that's partly due to endorphins, right? I have felt it a few times myself, it's amazing. You feel like your feet are barely touching the ground. It doesn't last forever. But most people don't actually feel a runner's high until after they run.

And that's because after they run, the endorphins are still pumping around your body, but there's no more pain signals to block. And so you get this like, these endorphins that are just creating that sort of euphoric really good feeling in your body because they've got nothing else to do at that point in time, right?

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You're not running anymore and so there they are hanging out going, "All right, well, let's just make her feel euphoric." Now, I'm totally anthropomorphizing the endorphins and oversimplifying it, it doesn't actually work exactly like that.

But really, the point is you've got endorphins in your body to block pain signals and then once you stop running, like there's this lag time, just like there's a lag time to get the endorphins started. There's also a lag time to when they stop getting produced. And that is where that really amazing feeling comes after you stop running.

And so again, runner's high, let's talk about the runner's high that happens while you're running. It is not an out of body experience, right? It's not like doing heroin, it's not like flying. It's just kind of a generalized good feeling that you have in your body. And often, it manifests as thinking really nice things about yourself. So if you're out running and you suddenly are like, "Wow, I'm just really awesome." That's probably your runner's high kicking in.

One more thing I want to touch on here is that there is actually nothing wrong with you if the first mile feels hard. Nothing wrong at all. In fact, if your first mile feels like ass, if your first 15 minutes feels like ass or whatever, it makes you just like every other runner. It makes you a real runner. It makes you an athlete. All right?

So I want you to kind of hold on to those thoughts and recognize that that is something you have in common with every other runner you see, with Olympic runners, with professional runners, right? That is something you have in common with them because for everyone there's that first period of time when you start the activity when it feels a lot harder than it will in a few moments, okay? So rest assured, if the first mile is hard for you, you're a real runner, you're just like all the others.

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So to sum it up today, I want you to warm up before every run, to ease into it. Okay, this is going to help that first mile feel less difficult, because it's going to prep your body a little bit before you start asking it to run, right? It's going to get your respiration and your heart rate a little bit elevated so that there's less of a ramp up when you start running.

I want you to stop telling yourself that the first mile should feel easy, right? That's because that's a lie. Stop lying to yourself that something has gone wrong with you. And finally, understand what the endorphin runner's high really, really is so that you can appreciate it when it shows up. Okay? So let that first mile suck so that you can enjoy the second mile, the joy of the second mile, that endorphin flood when your run is over and you're going to be run for a long time.

Okay, my friends, I hope today was helpful for you. And of course, if you loved it, please share it on Instagram. And 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/upandrunning to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.