Ep #291: Are You Too Fat to Run?

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With Your Host

Jill Angie

Ep #291: Are You Too Fat to Run?

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, hey, runners. So I'm back again to talk about being fat, being fat and being a runner. And I've talked a lot on this podcast about how you can be a runner at any size. I talk about it on Instagram all the time and Facebook. And of course there are always those trolls that come out and they say that running while fat will destroy your knees, or you should lose weight before you start to run. And then, of course, there's a weight loss program that they offer me when I click on their profile.

And I've had plenty of folks tell me that I am glorifying obesity by telling people that it is, A, just okay to exist as a fat person, that it is okay to run while you're a fat person, and that you actually have no moral obligation to lose weight. Oh my gosh, this makes people so angry.

Now, my favorite comment that I've received by far, and I've received it from multiple people, believe it or not, is they'll be like okay, well it's fine. Good for you for learning to love your body, but you really should be trying to lose weight while you're out there running. You don't want to be setting a bad example. And I'm like, well I respectfully disagree.

And then they always come back with, well good luck living past 50, because apparently 50 is some magical number where if you're fat you just drop dead. I did not know this, but apparently that's true according to the internet. But I'm 55, so I've already lived past 50. And when people say good luck living past 50 I'll say, well, actually I'm over 50. I'm 55. And they block me. Like it's an instant block when I say that. And I'm always

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confused. I'm like, okay, are you uncomfortable with facts? Because I'm literally just telling you my truth.

But anyway, all of those comments and stuff have actually got me thinking about whether there really is a point where somebody is too fat to run. And so I want to answer that question today. But first, if you are a wannabe fat runner, or maybe you're already a fat runner and you're not making the progress that you want to be, I have something for you.

Now, on Sunday, March 19th I'm teaching a free workshop about the most common mistakes that fat runners make and how to fix them. I have been coaching fat runners for 10 years now and I will be sharing the top three things that we usually get wrong and keep you from getting the result that you want, which is to feel good about your running.

This class, this workshop starts promptly at noon Eastern on Sunday, March 19th. It runs about two hours. You can sign up for free at notyouraveragerunner.com/fatrunnermistakes. Okay, that's notyouraveragerunner.com/fatrunnermistakes. Or you can go right to the link in the show notes for this episode.

All right, are you ready to talk about whether you are too fat to run? I am. Let's do this, let's go. So the first thing we need to talk about is this whole concept of being too fat, right? Because even those words, that term "too fat" is so fraught with meaning and judgment and like anti-fat bias.

And you have probably either been thinking it your whole life, oh, I'm too fat for this or I'm too fat for that, whatever it is. Or maybe you've been told by other people that you are too fat to do something, like, I don't know, one time I was told I was too fat to ride a horse. Or you may have been told that you're too fat or you're too big to go on an amusement park ride, whatever it is. Probably been told you're too fat to run. We're going to debunk that myth today.

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But there are circumstances out there like weight limits and heights limits and so forth that are decided usually by the business that is running the experience or whatever that says things like you must be at least four feet tall to ride this ride, or this bike has a maximum weight capacity of 297 pounds. And these are based on data and safety recommendations and are intended to provide some legal protection for whoever is providing the experience.

So for example, if you wanted to buy a Peloton bike, you could look up, you would see that the weight capacity for that bike is 297 pounds, the recommended weight capacity. And then if you're more than 297 pounds, you can decide do I want to purchase this bike? Do I want to ride this bike and see what happens, or do I want to find another bike or another activity?

But saying that you're too fat to ride the Peloton is really not super helpful, I don't think because, first of all, there's for sure lots of people out there who weigh more than 297 pounds who very successfully use the bike. Some of them are fat, some of them are not, right?

Because the human body weight is a function of a lot of things and it's not just how much body fat you have. You could be really tall and muscular like Dwayne The Rock Johnson, right? Who, by the way, tips the scales at around 260 pounds if Google is to be trusted, and nobody is calling him too fat to do anything, okay?

So when you say I'm too fat, what is a more accurate thing to say is, I am over the recommended weight capacity for this thing, or I have more body mass than is recommended, right? And also just a point here, when we're talking about equipment and experiences and so forth that have weight capacities, there are no recommended weight capacities for sidewalks or trails or anything like that, okay? It does not matter what you weigh, sidewalk, road, trail in the woods, not going to crumble under your weight. I promise, it's not a thing. Okay?

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But all that aside, there are no actual weight limits for running. There's no weight capacity, okay? I'm serious. Really, I know I approach this in sort of a sarcastic, jokey manner, but for real there's no such thing as too fat to run because there's no actual manual that says you got to be under 150 pounds or whatever weight people think is appropriate for runners.

So just like there's no definition of what pace makes somebody a fast runner or a slow runner – we talked about that a few weeks ago – there's no such thing as a weight over which you should not be a runner, okay? Usain Bolt is the fastest person in the world. I don't know if it's in the Guinness Book of World Records, but he's generally known as the fastest runner in the world. His name is Usain Bolt, he's super fast. He weighs 200 pounds, again, if Google is to be trusted. He weighs 200 pounds, right?

So if there really was a weight limit for being a runner, he wouldn't be allowed. People would be like, "Sorry, dude, you're too fat to run. You're too big to run." Okay? So there are no weight limits, you get to do it at whatever weight.

And remember, there's so much more that goes into body mass than just your fat. There's so much more on your body. There's so much working tissue that propels you forward, that saying you're too fat to run is just, it doesn't make sense. It's not a thing that we can point to as any kind of useful data to categorize whether or not it's appropriate for you to be a runner, okay?

Now, let's talk about whether it's more difficult to run when you're fat because I know that you've probably been with me this whole time. You're like, okay, yeah, that's fine. All of that is fine. But it's harder to run when you're fat. And I don't know, right?

First of all, there's no real definition of the word fat itself. So what's fat to you might not be fat to me. Back when I was in high school I weighed 150

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pounds in my senior year, I thought I was fat. I really thought I was fat. Now I look at pictures of myself and I was a very, very typical size for a teenage girl in the 80s, okay? So fat is relative.

And some fat folks are in exceptionally good cardiovascular condition, so running might feel easy to them. And then there are people who you wouldn't label as fat who don't have that cardiovascular capacity and they struggle with running.

So yes, increased body mass increases the amount of physical work that you're doing, right? You literally have more mass to move from point A to point B. But your physical fitness is a much better indicator of how running is going to feel to you than your actual weight. All right?

Now, what about everyone who says running while fat will ruin your joints, especially your knees? Okay, this is also not a rule that really holds water. This is based on misinformation and confusion and fat phobia and doctors who like to sell knee surgery because, first of all, there are plenty of fat people who run and don't have joint problems. And there are plenty of nonfat people who run and have injuries all over the place.

So if it was the fatness that caused the injuries, right, the fat people would be injured and the non fat people would not be injured. If it was the running that caused the injuries, then only runners would have problems and non runners would have no problems. And we know that's not the case, right? None of that is a rule that can be proven.

So yes, extra weight does increase the effective impact to your joints, but that is not really an issue if you're strong and your muscles are able to bear the burden and keep all of your joints and everything in alignment, okay? An increased impact to your joints actually stimulates bone growth. It literally makes your bones stronger and denser and more resistant to fractures.

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So if you are a woman over 40 and you're fat and you're a runner, you can just laugh in the face of osteoporosis because your bones are going to be strong AF, all right? I think you could actually argue that fat people have an advantage as runners, right? Because our bones are so much stronger.

Now, what people don't often realize about joint pain, and very specifically knee pain because that's the most common complaint that I hear from fat runners, is that the knee pain is very frequently – I know that's a redundant term, but it's frequently but even more. It's like most often it is a matter of muscular weakness or an unbalanced gait caused by muscular weakness, or tight tendons or ligaments, rather than your cartilage or bones degrading, okay?

So I've heard people say to me so many times, you are destroying your knees by running. And I'm like, actually, the knees are fine. Running does not cause your cartilage to break down. It does not cause your bones to break down. In fact, it does the exact opposite.

So if you're out running and you feel, I don't know, a stabbing pain on the side of your knee, it's probably just a tight IT band that you can stretch and roll and loosen up to relieve the pain. Or if you're going downstairs and you feel kind of a little bit of pain below your kneecap, that is quite possibly patellofemoral syndrome, which can happen when muscles around your hip and your knee don't keep your kneecap properly aligned, okay?

And so these are not bad knees. This is not destroying your knees. This is something that can literally be fixed with simple physical therapy exercises and ongoing strength training, which by the way, don't just benefit you as a runner, they benefit you throughout your entire life. The stronger you are, like, yeah, it helps you run pain free, but it also helps you live the activities of daily living that we all want to do.

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So physical therapy and ongoing strength training is not just like, oh, I have to do that so I can run, it's such a pain in the ass. It's like, no, it makes your whole life better.

And the other thing I want to talk about is arthritis, okay? Because I have arthritis in my knees, I have it in my hips, I have it in my hands, okay? Because running doesn't cause arthritis in your joints, all right? What's that? Louder for the people in the back? Running doesn't cause arthritis.

Most people over 30 or 40 already have some degree of arthritis in their joints, right? Have your finger joints, for example, gotten stiffer as you've gotten older? Maybe your wrists, maybe your elbows. I know mine have, and it's not because I'm a fat runner, right? It just runs in my family. And people of all sizes have it, okay? It's a normal part of aging. It is not caused by my body weight.

Now, if you already have pain in your knees before you've become a runner, then yes, that pain may be increased during the activity. And I think this is where the confusion comes in. People are like, oh, when I run the pain is worse. So it's because I'm fat and that's why my knees hurt when I run. And it's like, no, no, it's because you have some muscular imbalances, you have some maintenance that you need to do on your body to get you ready to run.

That's true whether you are fat or not, because I know plenty of nonfat people that are like, oh, I started running and my knees hurt. I'm like, oh, that's okay. That is your body's way of saying, hey, we have some alignment to do. We have some stuff to figure out before you can start running, okay? It's true whether you're fat or not. Very few people truly have "bad knees," all right?

I mean, yes, there are some folks who have had significant injuries in the past that may preclude them from running comfortably right now, right? If

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you've had a badly torn meniscus that couldn't be repaired because of where the tear was, then yeah, maybe running is not for you. If you've got ACL injuries that haven't healed properly, yep, running might not be for you.

If you have, like the way your joints are put together is not supportive of running, and again, very, very few people really have this issue, it has nothing to do with weight, then yes, running might not be appropriate for you. But again, this is such a small, small sliver of the population.

Losing weight might lessen the immediate discomfort when you're running if you've got some pain that's not due to a past injury or something. But the real solution is not to lose a bunch of weight. It's to fix the imbalances and make yourself strong, because that's going to be a much more sustainable solution than trying to diet yourself down to a lower weight and then struggling to maintain it, okay?

So in my opinion, and this may be an unpopular opinion, saying I have bad knees is usually another way of saying I have weak supporting muscles, all right? So go make an appointment with a sports doc, follow up with physical therapy, start introducing running to your routine very slowly to test the waters, okay?

Now, again, before I get a bunch of hate mail from somebody who has a severe case of arthritis caused by genetic factors, yes, there are exceptions to every rule and there are always going to be a few people who don't fit into the general descriptions I've provided. But chances are high that your knee pain or your hip pain is not a result of your weight, but of other factors that can be solved. And your weight might slightly increase the intensity of the pain or discomfort you feel when running, but it is not the cause, all right?

Now, the other consideration of how hard running feels when you're fat is just your current fitness level. So before you start running, I want you to be

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able to comfortably walk for at least two to three miles at a time without feeling really tired or having lots of discomfort, okay?

If walking that distance is a struggle for you and the next day every muscle in your body is sore, you need to increase your walking capacity before you start running, okay? You are not too fat to run, you just need to create more fitness. You need to increase your fitness level. That's it. And that's something you can do with consistent practice, okay?

I want you to make sure you understand this. Even if you are not able to walk comfortably right now for two to three miles, you are still not too fat to run. You are just not at the fitness level yet that it makes sense to start running. Because I know runners of all sizes. I know 300 pound marathoners, all right? There is no such thing as too fat to run.

Here's something that makes me laugh, when somebody comments on a video of me saying, "Oh, you're too fat to be doing that," a video of me running and they're saying, "Oh, you're too fat to be doing that." And I'm like, well, I am doing it. As you can see in the video, I am successfully running at this weight. I'm just confused. I'm like, what do you mean I'm too fat? I'm doing it, right?

So I think what they really mean is, I have been socially conditioned to believe that being fat is a moral failing. And also I have no filter, so I'm just going to spew all of my fat phobic views right here on your page. That's what they're really saying.

But seriously, there's no such thing as too fat to run. It's a myth. There is simply your body's readiness to start. And that's not a weight thing, it's a strength and endurance thing. And there will be lots of people out there who disagree. Some of them might even tell you that you should lose weight first and you have my permission to tell them all to fuck right off. Or

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if you're not inclined to swear at people, you can just smile and say, your opinion is noted. And then be done with the conversation.

Keep doing you because it is your body, it is your decision, and nobody else can decide what is best for you, okay? Okay.

Now, before I go, make sure you get yourself signed up for that free workshop about the mistakes that most fat runners make and how to fix them. You can sign up at notyouraveragerunner.com/fatrunnermistakes, or go to the link in the show notes. And yes, it will be recorded, so if you can't make it live I'm sending the recording out to every person who registers. So get yourself registered. Notyouraveragerunner.com/fatrunnermistakes or go to the link in the show notes.

All right, my friend, that is it for this episode. I love you. Stay safe. Get your ass out there and run and I will talk to you next week.

Real quick before you go. If you enjoyed this episode, you have to check out Run Your Best Life. It's my monthly coaching program where you will learn exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you have always wanted to be. Head on over to runyourbestlife.com to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.