

Ep #304: How to Stop Stressing About Your Running Pace



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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, hey runners. So you may notice that this week's podcast came out a day early, and that is because today is Global Running Day. This is an actual holiday, this is a real thing. It takes place on the first Wednesday of June every year and it is a worldwide celebration of running at all paces and styles and running for all bodies. It is a very inclusive holiday. Basically if you run, this is a day to celebrate you.

But I'm kind of rebranding it a little here in the Not Your Average Runner universe to be Global Fat Running Day because honestly, in the running world fat runners are an afterthought. It's like, oh yeah, everybody can be a runner, but we're also only going to feature a certain body type in our magazines and our websites.

And oh my gosh, the companies who make workout gear, I can't even. I've had several really big brands reach out to me in the past few months and say, "Hey, we really want you to rep our stuff." And then it only goes up to like a size 16 or an 18. And I'm just like, are you kidding me? Are you fucking kidding me?

So, yes, Global Running Day is amazing. I love that we have a running holiday, but also I want to start observing it as Global Fat Running Day because you deserve to be recognized and celebrated.

And no holiday would be complete without a sale, so we are doing something really epic here from June 7th to 9th, and that is to offer a big, big discount off of a year of Run Your Best Life. So, normally Run Your

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Best Life is \$49 a month, but in honor of Global Fat Running Day, you can sign up for a full year for \$390, which is a savings of \$200. Like seriously.

I don't know, that's two pairs of running shoes. That's five, maybe six 5ks. \$200 is a big savings. So if you have been on the fence about joining, thinking like, "Oh, I'm going to wait until there's an awesome deal or there's a sign from the universe," or something, this is it. This is your sign, right here.

So run on over to runyourbestlife.com, and again for the next three days, through June 9th you can grab a full year of Run Your Best Life for just \$390. And this is not going to last past Friday, so you've got to do it right now. In fact, I'll wait for you. Just hit pause, go to Run Your Best Life right now, join up, and then come back so we can talk about how to stop stressing about your running pace. Okay, are you back? Let's go.

So, speaking of Run Your Best Life, the other night we were on a mindset coaching call in that group and we were talking about how most people in the running world are very pace focused. Like they're always talking about their pace, they're trying to get faster, they're trying to set a PR. And if you're not familiar with it, PR means personal record, it means the fastest you've ever done that distance or that race or whatever.

And then if that doesn't happen, if they're struggling to get faster or if they don't set a PR or whatever, they get really bummed out and they start thinking they're not making progress and feeling really disappointed and discouraged. And this is pretty common among the running world, right? It is like this mindset that pace is king.

And I have definitely had those thoughts before. But I'll tell you, it can really hold you back from enjoying your running and it can definitely take away your feeling of pride after a race as well as stress you out before the event. But here's the thing, we are taught to think that way. We are taught to think

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that the only way to get, and I'm using air quotes here, the only way to get better at running is to be faster. And we're taught that the best runners are the fastest runners.

And you might be saying, "Well, yeah, duh. How else do you measure performance? Isn't that the whole point of the Olympics, to come in first place and get a gold medal?" And yes, that is an example of where the fastest person is considered the best, but I don't know, what, maybe one in a million can actually qualify for the Olympics? I don't even know if that number is correct, I Googled it.

I Googled what percentage of the population qualifies for the Olympics, and I got just bupkis as an answer. So if you know what percentage of people can actually qualify for the Olympics, please let me know.

But anyway, in some cases, like the Olympics, the best runner is the fastest runner. We've decided ahead of time the person who wins is the person who is the fastest. But unfortunately that mentality has permeated the entire running community. And I'm not talking like recently, I mean this is probably hundreds of years. As long as there have been foot races, the point of the activity is to win.

But now we have all these people that are doing it just to do it. And so we've got people who are like, "Listen, I just like to run." But there's this prevailing mentality in the running community, that faster is better. And so new runners entering the sport think, "Oh, that's the only way to assess my performance."

And so, I have some issues with that. And mainly, it's why the fuck do we get so obsessed with assessing our performance, and then upset if we're not improving, right? Why are we so obsessed with that? And I'm going to tell you why. Here's why I think.

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But before I do that, did you know that you can just suck at something and keep doing it because you enjoy it, even if you never, ever get better at it? I'm just going to put that thought out into the universe, because you can just suck at running, and keep running because you're like, this is fun and I like it or, I feel so much better after I do it. It's so good for my mental health, it's good for my body, whatever. It's like something I could do with my friends, right?

You can just suck it running and keep doing it and you don't have to ever, ever be trying to get better at it. So I'm putting that out there because I think that a focus on performance and improvement really sucks the fun out of things a lot of the time.

So I think there's two reasons that as humans we are focused on performance, we're focused on competition and winning. And the first is that we're simply wired for it, right? Like when we get this huge hit of dopamine, we feel elated and joyful, it motivates us to try again. Now, the problem with that is that we won't always win, right?

So if you're somebody who has linked your good feelings and motivation to a circumstance, like always getting faster than the time before. If you think the only way I can feel proud of myself is if I'm constantly improving, right, it's kind of like winning money at a casino because you're not always going to get better. You're not always going to get faster. And if you're chasing that high, like when you win money, we've all been there, we put money into a slot machine.

And I will go to a casino, we have casinos in our neighborhood now, and I'll go to a casino and be like, "I'm giving myself \$20 to spend. That's all I'm willing to give to the casino folks." And I'll lose most of that \$20, but then I might win and then I've got \$30. And it's such a high that I think, "Well it happened once, it'll probably happen again."

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And next thing you know, I've completely spent the money that I want. So I could have walked out having more money than I started with. But I get so addicted to that dopamine high of winning, that we keep trying and trying and then we end up leaving with nothing, right?

And I think that a similar kind of thing happens when we pin our motivation and our good feelings about running to our pace. Because you're not always going to be getting faster, you're not always going to "win," you're not always going to be better, sometimes you might come in dead last.

And you're always going to be chasing that high, and then when you don't win, when you don't get what you want, it can be devastating. So we're wired for this competition, but we kind of get it a little bit twisted when it comes to something like running.

And then the other piece of our focus on performance is that not only are we wired for it, we are socialized to compete. We are socialized to always want to be better than somebody else. And I hear you, for those of you who are saying, "Well, I don't compete with other people, I just compete with myself," right? It's still competing. You're still trying to win. Even if you're winning against your past self, you're still trying to be the best, right?

We want to know that we're better than somebody else, even if that somebody else is our past version of us. And that's why we get so anxious about coming in last in a race, because not only do we feel like we failed, we think other people will be judging us, right? Because we assume everyone else thinks the same way.

And even when you think about fitness inspiration, there's so many inspirational quotes, and I'm using inspirational again in air quotes, about winning and being better than other people or being better than your past self. Really implying that there's something lacking in you if you're not constantly striving to be better, right?

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Like that popular one that says, “Even if you’re slow, you’re still lapping everyone on the couch.” Come on, can we please stop saying that, right? It’s like, okay, I’m slow. But I’m still better than some imaginary person I’ll never meet who may have lots of reasons for being on the couch that are none of my fucking business, right? If that’s what you need to make yourself feel better about your pace, we’ve got to talk. We’ve got to re-engineer your thinking, okay?

Before I go too far into this, if you’re somebody who is super competitive and you’re like, “Hey, I feel really called out right now,” either you’re competitive with yourself or with others, it’s normal. You’re wired that way, you’ve been socialized to believe that winning is the point, right? I’ve had lots of those thoughts in the past about myself.

And honestly, I think I’m not a super competitive person because I was not socialized, in my family of origin we didn’t really do competition. And so I have kind of the wiring, but I don’t necessarily have my parents drilling into me that you need to be, you need to win. My mother just drilled it into me that I needed to be the thinnest. That didn’t work very well.

But I think that that’s why I struggled a little bit when I played sports in high school, because I didn’t really care that much if we won, I just wanted to have fun. I played tennis and I was on the swimming team. And I was just like, “Hey, this is just fun for me.” Because to me winning was great, but winning was just a moment in time and that’s it, right? Then you just go on and you’re still the same person after you won that you were before you won.

But I do definitely still have that sort of natural competitiveness that I think all of us have. I think for me it’s just at a low level because it wasn’t emphasized or it wasn’t increased by being socialized that way.

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But anyway, I'm getting off track here. The thing is, winning is not the point. And I think so many people, especially if you were raised in the United States, think that winning is the point of life. When you're dead, it's not going to fucking matter. You're not going to be able to go like, "I died, but I won," right? No. On your deathbed, you're not going to be stressed out because you came in last in a race or something like that.

I mean, unless you're a professional runner, by the way, winning is really and truly not the point. I mean, even if you're a high school or college athlete, yes, you want your team to win, but it's really more about the person you are becoming through pursuing the sport, right? That was always my approach to it.

That was my coach's approach to sports as well when I was in high school. And if the person that you're becoming through pursuing the sport is someone who feels like they need to win or they're going to feel terrible, I think that is a downfall of our sports system in general, right? We're putting the emphasis on winning at the expense of everything else.

But anyway, you might believe the opposite of me, right? You might think that winning or at least being better than someone else is the point. So I'm telling you right now that winning is not the point, again, unless you're an Olympic athlete or you're one of the elite runners in the London Marathon. But it might be uncomfortable to hear that winning is not the point, right? Or you might be shaking your head right now, kind of calling me a snowflake saying, "Oh, everybody gets a participation trophy," right?

But seriously, how's that working for you, right? Striving to win, being better than other people, or always being better than your past self can be really fucking stressful. And it's optional. It's totally optional. And I am not saying that it is terrible to try to win, to try to be better than your past self, any of that. It's fine to do those things.

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But when it creates a lot of pain and suffering for yourself if you don't achieve it, you're beating yourself up for not being as fast as you used to be last month or last year or even 10 years ago, right? Which is crazy, because of course you're not as fast as you were 10 years ago, you're older, you're 10 years older.

But if the reason that you want to win, the reason that you want to be getting better is because you think that's the only way you can feel good about yourself, feel worthy, believe that you're successful, it might be time to take a look at those beliefs to see if they're serving you, okay?

I think setting goals to improve, whether it's in running or something else, I think that's awesome if they give you that motivation to keep running. But not at the expense of your mental health. Not at the expense of your well-being. Not at the expense of self-compassion. And spoiler alert, there will come a point in your life where you are the fastest you will ever be as a runner. I'm so sorry to break it to you, but that is human physiology, okay?

Now, depending on when you started running and how old you are, you might not have hit your peak yet, right? If you started running at age 50 and you're 54, you might still have some pace gains that you can still make. But rest assured, eventually you will run the fastest mile you're ever going to run. And unless you decide, I'm literally going to stop running right now, that's it, I'm done, you're going to get slower afterwards.

So that means if you've already run your fastest mile ever, and you don't let yourself feel proud, if your belief is like I can't feel proud unless I keep getting faster, you're screwed, my friend. You're not in a good place.

So what are you supposed to do if you're stressed about not getting any faster or maybe even getting slower and you're thinking you're either failing at running or you're not motivated anymore because you thought the whole point was about getting faster and what's the point if I can't? Well, the first

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thing I want you to remember is that running at all is a privilege. And there are millions, probably billions of people in the world who don't have that privilege, either because they don't have a safe place to do it, right?

Maybe they don't have a well-lit area to run. Or maybe they're part of a marginalized population that's just like, "Hey, I can't fucking run in public because my life could be in danger," right? Or maybe they're just barely hanging on financially and every spare minute of their lives is going toward paying the bills and, seriously, 100 bucks for running shoes? I don't think so. Or maybe their body is injured or impacted by a disease or an accident and they literally can't run.

And that's not to say that y'all aren't struggling yourselves to make running happen. I'm not downplaying anyone's personal circumstances. I'm not saying that somebody who can't run for whatever reason deserves more pity or sympathy. This is none of that bullshit, right? I'm not downplaying your circumstances.

But I do want to get you into the mindset of how if you are fortunate enough to be able to take some time each week to run, that starting out with the gratitude that you have the privilege to be able to stress out about your pace, it's kind of helpful to start from that place of like, okay, well, I am grateful that this first world problem of worrying about my running pace is something that I get to worry about. Okay? So really, start from that mental space.

Now, let's get into details, right? What are you supposed to do when you're either not making the speed gains you want, or maybe you're finding yourself slowing down despite all your training, or you got injured and you're coming back from an injury, and you're like, I don't know, my body's just not the same, I'm not running the pace that I want to run. And I'm training and I'm doing all the things and I'm just working so hard and I'm either not getting faster or I'm getting slower.

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So the first thing I want to point out to you is that if you're doing all the things to try and get faster, you might actually be shooting yourself in the foot, okay? Because over training, which means training more than your body can handle. When we are training for a race or when you're strength training or something, you put your body under a certain amount of stress. And then you rest and you allow it to kind of rebuild and get stronger. And then you come back and you give it a little bit more stress.

But overtraining is when we go overboard, right? And we do way more than we should and we don't give our body enough rest time to recover. And this is the fastest way to derail your progress, short of like breaking your leg. Okay? So if you are running four times a week and you're not seeing improvement and you think, well, I need to run five times a week. No. No you do not, it's going to make it worse, all right? Your body needs time to rest and recover.

If you don't give it what it needs, it will take care of things, okay? It will respond by either slowing down or by getting injured. So make sure, before you start saying, "I've tried everything, I'm doing all the things," I want you to try rest. Okay? Try rest and see what happens. And I don't mean take a nap. I mean take time off. Maybe it's a week, right? Maybe it's three or four days, but truly take some time off. Give your body a chance to rest and recover.

I had somebody in Run Your Best Life earlier this year who ran a marathon. It was a Disney marathon, I don't know if it was the Disney marathon or if it was the full dopey challenge, but it was a significant effort. She'd been training for it for a while. And then we got on a coaching call, it was like two, three weeks afterwards.

And she's like, "I'm really struggling because I'm not recovering. And I'm trying to run and it feels really hard. And I'm running slower than I was before the race. What's wrong? What's wrong with me?" And that was it.

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That was like coming at it from like, I've done something wrong and I've broken myself or what's wrong with my running?

And I'm like, "Well, did you take any time off after the race?" She's like, "Yeah, I took a couple days off." And I'm like, "Okay, after a marathon." And for some reason I think it was the dopey challenge. But after a training cycle where you're running 18 miles, 20 miles, 22 miles, and then you're showing up on race day giving it your all to run 26 miles, taking two days off, that is not rest and recovery, right?

And so she took a couple days off and then she was jumping right back in. This is not me dissing her saying, "Oh my gosh, what were you thinking?" Because honestly, I think it's pretty normal to believe that like, okay, I took a day or two off, I should be able to get right back to it. And it's really, like it's counterintuitive but I'm like, "I want you to take two full weeks off from running." And her face, she's like, "You want me to what? What now?" I'm like, "Two weeks."

Because she had another half marathon coming up. And I'm thinking if this is how running feels now, that half marathon is going to suck. So I was like you take two full weeks off from running. You can go for a walk here and there, but no running. And two weeks later, she came back and she's like, "Guess what? I feel amazing. Thank you." She was like a new woman.

And sometimes it really is as simple as that, okay? So before you get all stressed out about your pace, take a look and see if you're overtraining, okay? If you're not overtraining, and by the way, the best way to find out if you're overtraining is to ask a coach. We have those in Run Your Best Life, just saying.

But if you're not overtraining, it's time to see if you are over thinking. Because when you're focused on the only way to assess my success, that's hard to say. The only way to decide if I'm successful is if I'm getting

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faster, right? And then you're not getting faster, your brain is going to start spinning out. But there are so many ways to assess your running performance. Pace is just one of the many, many, many ways to assess your performance.

And again, I want to reiterate, you are under no obligation to be continually performing better, right? That is not a thing that you are required to do. But if that is a thing that in your brain you're like, yes, but I always want to be getting better. I think rather than fight against that mindset that you have, let's just work with it and figure out some other ways to assess your running performance.

So I'm going to give you a whole bunch of them right now. So first of all, maybe you are no longer struggling to do your training runs. This is huge. Maybe you used to feel unmotivated or you used to have to argue with yourself to get out of bed and go for that run or to come home from work and go for that run. And now maybe that daily motivation is like fast and furious and you actually like running now and you even look forward to it.

And that is huge. That is a big mental shift and I feel like we kind of don't even give ourselves credit for creating that new thought pattern in our brain. So if that daily motivation is there and you like running now, if you look forward to it, maybe we even talk to other people about it, maybe you have stopped saying, "Oh, I run but I'm slow" or "Oh, I run but I do run/walk" or whatever. Maybe you are talking differently about your running to other people. Boom, that's an improvement in your performance, okay?

Maybe you've gotten consistent with strength training, right? And you haven't had an injury in two years. This is like the Holy Grail for runners, to be able to run as much as they want without getting hurt. And if you have achieved that, I don't care how fast you're running, like boom, nailed it. Nailed it.

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Now, maybe you are able to go running for a lot longer. Maybe more time, more distance, I guess they're kind of the same thing, than before. By the way, the farther you run, the slower you will get naturally. Again, that's how it works. It's biophysics. You might actually just go out and run one mile. Like if you normally are doing 6, 7, 8 mile training runs, or even like three or four mile training runs, and you're like, "I don't know, I'm not getting any faster." Go out and just plan to run one mile and give it your all. And you might find out actually that you're faster than you thought, okay?

So if you have been able to increase your endurance, to go more, farther than you could before, to run longer, ka-ching, nailed it, good job. Maybe you don't have aches and pains after a run like you used to, right? You can just go out and run and come home and feel fine the next day, that's a huge win, that is progress.

Maybe you have figured out your fueling so you can run half marathons without bonking or without shitting yourself in the first few miles, right? Fueling is definitely an art. And hey, sometimes it takes people a while to figure it out. And so if you figured that out, again, that's progress. That's huge, huge progress.

Maybe now instead of running with music, or books in your ear to kind of keep you motivated, you're like, I think running is just so interesting and joyful that I want to do it in silence, right? Maybe you've attained a whole new level of your running practice where you don't want anything to interrupt it because it's just that powerful for you.

So all of these are amazing evidence of progress as a runner. None of them have anything to do with you needing to get faster and set PRs and not come in last in a race to feel good about yourself, okay? So I want you to remember that feeling proud of yourself comes from your thinking, not your results, okay?

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You can feel proud of anything you want with your thoughts. You don't have to hit a certain pace. You don't have to run a certain distance or whatever. You can just decide that whatever you're doing is great and be proud of yourself. I'm serious about this. And you're like, "Oh, it must be so easy for you." Well, yeah, I've had to work on it, but you really can just decide, like, hey, I did that thing. And I'm really fucking proud of myself. And I don't care if nobody else understands why I'm proud, I'm proud and that's what matters, okay?

And even if you're slower now than you've ever been, even if you came in last in your race, none of that has any bearing on your worth as a runner. It is not indicative of the effort you're putting in. I'm going to say that again, like the place that you came in your last race, the pace that you're running now is not indicative of the effort you're putting in, okay? And it does not mean that you are failing. All right? All right.

Now, real quick, don't forget to grab that sweet one year deal on Run Your Best Life where we coach on stuff like this all the time. Just go to runyourbestlife.com. You can get \$200 off of a one year membership. I mean, come on, \$200. All right? You can buy a lot of running shoes with that. So runyourbestlife.com, the deal ends on Friday, June 9th. Let's fucking go. Happy Global Fat Running Day my friend. All right, 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.