

## Ep #305: Never Stress About Race Day Again



### 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. Well, we are deep into race season right now and this is about the time of year when people start getting really stressed and anxious about upcoming events. So if that is you, good news, this is your episode. And race day anxiety is really common. Like really, really common. I have had more than a few races where I was so stressed out I slept maybe two solid hours the night before.

My first triathlon in particular, I was a mess. And it's partly because I knew it was going to rain cats and dogs the next day and I hadn't really trained in the rain. I was very scared of riding my bike in the rain. And partly because I'm like, what the fuck was I thinking? I'm a fat woman, I shouldn't be in a triathlon. So there were a lot of thoughts going on. I was really nervous and I barely slept the night before.

The night, well the entire week really before my first trail Ragnar I was so stressed. And again, this is partly because I was bringing two teams of Run Your Best Life members to the race. But also because I had never ever, ever run in the woods after dark, like ever and I was terrified. Even though I knew there would be literally hundreds of other people doing the same thing in the same place at the same time. I was still like, oh, I'm going to be that person that comes across a Yeti and is never heard from again, right?

So, I mean, for those two examples you can understand the worry, right? It's logical. They were very new situations for me, totally normal to feel some fear of that unknown. But before my first half marathon I was also really, really nervous. And I was telling myself that I didn't know if I could

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finish, despite having successfully done a 12 mile run just two weeks earlier, right?

My body was in great shape. I had no injuries, no aches or pains. I felt amazing. I had trained really well. There was absolutely no reason for me to be stressed out. I had already done dozens of races, right? I'd been a runner for a long time. My longest race was a 10 miler. This particular half marathon started at the same place as many races I'd already done. It covered a city route I was really familiar with.

My family was going to be on the chorus cheering me on. I had a friend running the race who was going to be in the same starting corral. The weather was perfect. I really nailed my fueling. I'd practiced everything, all of it. And I was still terrified. And why was I so scared? I knew I was ready.

But here's the thing, right, anxiety is not always a rational emotion. And we know this. It's a fight or flight sort of reaction when our nervous system senses danger. And danger doesn't have to be something like being chased by a bear, right? Danger could be anything that you have been conditioned to fear, like failing, or being bullied, or failing, I guess, really. Like saying you're going to do something and then not being able to do it.

And that fight or flight reaction is often also triggered when you're facing an unknown situation. When your brain is like, I don't know what's going to happen, there are a lot of factors here that I don't have control over. When you're facing a situation that you don't necessarily have control over or where there are unknown factors, that can also kind of get you into that anxiety mode.

And it can also be triggered by hormonal changes during perimenopause. Did you know that? I used to wake up in the middle of the night in a full on panic attack for no reason. And that is just terrifying because you're like, what is happening? Why is my heart rate spiking? Why do I feel so dizzy?

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Why does the world feel like it's ending? And I was just having a dream about decorating cupcakes and I woke up and my body is freaking out. So that's a slightly different kind of anxiety. But if you can relate. If you know, you know, right?

But anyway, the worry and fear and anxiety about an upcoming race is very, very often not a rational thing, but it doesn't make it any less real. Okay? And again, most of the time you're wasting anxiety isn't going to be a full on panic attack, but rather your brain just getting stuck in a loop thinking and obsessing about all of the things that could go wrong, right?

And when you think about all of the things that can go wrong, keep asking yourself the question, what if this? What if that? It creates that anxiety and then it's hard to break out of the loop once it starts. And most of the time, we're like, "Yeah, brain, you're absolutely right. This is a total shit show. It's probably the end of life as we know it," when it's literally like, "I wonder if it's going to rain on my race tomorrow," right? But we get so worked up about it.

And when you're thinking all of those worried thoughts and then feeling all of those emotions, this is where it really matters, right? It's not just that you're worried about your race, it can actually impact your sleep, your digestion, your energy, right? It impacts your body in so many ways, and all of those can impact your performance on race day. And then some of your worst fears actually might come true, right?

You might get yourself so worked up that you just don't sleep at all the night before. I've totally been there, done that. You might miss the starting gun because you're so anxious that your digestion is jacked up and so you're sitting in line at the porta potty because your stomach is in knots. And everybody else is in the starting corral, right? Or maybe your body just feels awful, because you've just flooded it with so many stress hormones that

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your joints don't feel good or your muscles don't feel good and you don't run your best race.

So it's not just your mental health that's impacted. It is everything, right? Your mental health has a huge impact on your body. And so that stress can literally create a lot of the results that you're afraid of. So what is causing this anxiety? What triggers that fight or flight response? And spoiler alert, it is your thoughts. It's always your thoughts. And most of these thoughts are actually completely normal because they are totally reasonable things to be thinking.

And usually they are questions, right? And they're normal questions to ask. Things like, what if I didn't train enough? What if I can't finish? Or what if I come in last? What if it rains? What if it's too hot? What if it's too cold? What if I oversleep? What if I get lost? What if I have to poop at mile two when there's no porta potty, right? What if I'm not prepared enough to go the full distance?

So these are pretty normal questions. I think it's very human to ask those questions. The problem, though, when you get stuck in that worry loop is that instead of answering the question, right, if you ask yourself the question, "Wow, what if I'm not prepared enough?" If you answer the question, okay, well, then I'll probably be slower than I wanted. Or maybe I'll come in last, or maybe I won't finish. And it's just a race and yada, yada, yada, right?

If you follow it to its natural end, it's a lot less stressful than just re-asking the question over and over and over again, right? We're like, what if I didn't train enough? And our brain is like, yeah, oh my God, what if that happens? And then that's when the panic starts. So we just stop the process at actually answering the question and figuring out the resolution, and we just stay in that loop of, but what if, but what if, I can't handle it, I can't handle it. All right?

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And so that is usually where the race day anxiety resides, is in that loop of asking questions and not going any farther than just asking it over and over in our brain and really kind of freaking out because we think we can't handle it.

Fortunately, there is hope because I know you've probably experienced this, maybe not around a race. Maybe you've never done a race. Maybe you're brand new to running or you haven't started yet and you're listening to this podcast for some inspiration. And you're like, "Oh, all right, let's listen to this one." And you're like, "Holy shit. If this is what it's like to be a runner, I'm out."

I want you to know, there is hope. Okay? And I think it's pretty much impossible to completely eliminate those questions and those thoughts because you've got a human brain and that's what we do. We're always looking for danger. But you can do work in advance to mitigate their impact so that you can enjoy and be present for your training and your race day, okay? So you can really experience it instead of just doing your best to suffer through it because you said you were going to run this stupid race, right?

So today, I'm going to share three tips to help you do exactly that. To mitigate the impact of these thoughts and allow yourself to enjoy and be present for your training and your race day, and maybe even have an awesome race day.

So the first one is actually a very easy one. It is. It's something I include in all of the training programs that I teach over in Run Your Best Life. And it's basically do at least one dress rehearsal before your race, okay? And by dress rehearsal, I mean everything. The exact gear, the fueling plan, the hydration plan, the playlist, even the route. As close as possible to the route that you're going to be running as you'll be doing on race day.

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I want you to do it at the same time of day as your race. So if your race starts at 7 am and you think, okay, I'm going to need to get up at five so that I can get my first fuel in, and get my poop in and take a shower if I want to or not, or whatever your thing is. But you know if your race is at seven, then I want you to plan your whole pre-race, pre-dress rehearsal routine as if you're doing it on race day, okay?

And again, the exact same outfit that you think you're going to wear at your actual race. The socks, the shoes, the underwear, the bra, the top, the bottoms, the jacket, the hat, the visor, the sunglasses, all of the things, okay, the fuel belt. I want you to get up and practice your fueling that morning, all the things, okay?

And you're going to do this dress rehearsal, this is very important, on the second to last long run of your training. Not the last long run, the second to last long run. And here's why, because if there are issues, if you find out, oh, actually, I can't wear those socks with those shoes because I'm going to get blisters. Or I need to rethink my chafing strategy because I ended up getting chafing in an unexpected spot or something like that. If there are issues, you're going to fix them and then repeat it again on your longest run.

So if you're training for a half marathon and your longest training run is a 10 miler and it's three weeks out. So if you're following my beginner half marathon training plan, your longest training run will be a 10 miler and it'll be three weeks before race day, okay? Two weeks before that one, you're going to do a nine mile run. And your nine mile run will be your dress rehearsal. And then if something doesn't work right, you're going to repeat it on your 10 mile run and then you'll know for sure.

Okay, so that's how you're going to do a dress rehearsal. And a dress rehearsal can really help a lot in setting your mind at ease because you're literally going to be like, okay, I know exactly when I'm going to take my



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different fuels. I know that this outfit works, right? So it's going to put a lot of those questions to bed because you're going to have tested it out, probably twice. And you'll know like, okay, this work. This works for me. This is a thing that I can rely on.

So another thing I want you to do during your training, and it's not necessarily a specific dress rehearsal, but it is something that's going to help you prepare for race day. And that is to do your best to do some of your training runs in inclement weather. And by inclement weather I don't mean a thunderstorm, right? If there's lightning out there, the race is going to be canceled, so you don't need to train in lightning. Please don't do that, that's not safe.

If there's hail, I'm pretty sure that the race will be canceled, so again, if there's tornadoes, right? So don't train in any conditions where they might actually cancel the race. You don't need to put yourself in danger. Please don't do that. But most races won't be canceled if it's just raining.

Most races won't be canceled if it's hot out, unless it's like 120 degrees or something that's literally dangerous. But a lot of races if it's 100 degrees, they're still going to have that race, okay? If it's 40 degrees, it's 30 degrees, I've done races where it was below 30 degrees, right? Unless it's physically dangerous, they're still going to have the race. So you've got to train in those conditions.

And I know this is what happens, you've got a long run scheduled, you're looking at the week, you're looking at the weekend and you're like, "Oh, I've got an eight mile run this weekend and it's supposed to rain. So I should probably reschedule so I can do that run when it's nicer."

No, no, no, you're going to do that run in the rain because you're going to learn what gear works for you in that kind of weather so you don't find out the hard way on race day that the shoe and sock combination you chose

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gives you blisters when your feet get wet, right? So you're going to practice running in shitty weather, okay? Because your training isn't just about getting the miles in, it is about practicing all aspects of race day, okay?

So then when you start thinking ahead of time, like oh my God, what if it rains? What if it rains? You'll know. You're like, oh, no, I've got a plan for that, okay? You're going to know exactly what gear to bring, how to prevent chafing on wet skin, how to keep water out of your eyes, and how to keep your fuel dry. You'll know all those things.

You will know that rain is something you can handle, right? So when your brain is like, what if it rains? You're like, this is exactly what I'm going to do when it rains. And even if it's not the most fun way to race, you are going to be confident that you can finish and that it's not going to hold you back, okay?

So that dress rehearsal and that practicing of various conditions throughout your training is so important. And those worries that you have about what if this happens, right, like, yes, the weather is not within your control, but how you react to the weather is within your control. Okay? So much depends on your ability to be prepared for different circumstances. And that's what the dress rehearsal is for and that's what your training is for. It's not just about getting the miles on your feet.

Okay, the second thing, this technique is so good. It is something that pretty much all professional athletes use. And it's basically the concept of visualizing your success, right? So during your training, you're going to spend a few minutes a week, I mean, you could do it a few minutes a day, actually. I think that'd be even more powerful. But at least once a week you're going to sit down, spend some time visualizing your success.

By this, I mean close your eyes and picture each moment of your race. From the start line to the finish line. And picture feeling good and feeling

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proud. And picture, okay, yeah, my brain is going to throw some questions at me, but I'm going to be great about answering them and moving on, it's not going to hold me back.

This is such a powerful thing to do, and most people don't even bother. They're like, well, what's the point? That's not going to help. But first of all, it's free, it's easy, it takes just a few moments. You can literally do it while you're brushing your teeth or while you're taking a shower or after you get in bed. As you're kind of falling asleep, that's a really great time to do it because you're sort of priming your brain to keep up that visualization after you fall asleep.

And basically, it's like creating a movie in your mind, all right? And that movie starts from maybe the night before or the morning of the race and goes through to you crossing the finish line. And you are going to direct that movie exactly how you want it to go.

So create the script of your success with you in the starring role, and then watch that movie in your mind. It's so powerful. I have used this technique, not just for races, but for other things. And it has given me spectacular results that I'm just like, wow. Just from imagining success, and in detail imagining all the aspects of it, I was able to create it. It's so powerful.

And if you want to go even deeper with this technique, I have something that I teach to my Run Your Best Life members called the coffee shop story. It's very simple. This is where you kind of either imagine you're meeting a friend for coffee, it's a few days after the race, right? So it's in the future. You're meeting your friend for coffee and she's like, "Hey, how did your race go?" And you tell her all about your awesome race in detail.

You're like, well, first I did this. And then I did this. And then this happened. And here's how I reacted, right? And I want you to write it down. Like get out a notebook and literally write out the story as you would tell it to

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somebody else. And you can talk about the challenges. You can talk about some challenges. Maybe even include some of your training in the story as well and say, well, this happened and here's how I dealt with it. And I was really proud of myself, right?

And then once you've written it out, you can read it every day before your race to reinforce it. And my half marathon students in Run Your Best Life do this and it really, really works. So this combined with visualization is a very, very powerful way to kind of combat those questions.

Because again, the reason that we get so anxious is because we start asking ourselves these what if questions, and we sort of get stuck in that loop. And the visualization and the writing out of the coffee shop story take you out of that loop. They put you into the place of imagining what could go right, instead of what could go wrong. It's super powerful.

And now the final technique is to actually journal about your concerns. And sometimes I call this a thought download where you just write down everything that's stressing you out, okay? And first of all, the act of writing things down can really help you gain clarity and separation from your anxiety so that you can assess whether something needs attention or if you can just let it go, right?

So you're just going to sit down and write out every single thing you're stressed about, no matter how small, like related to this race. What is it that you think is making you so anxious? And then anything within your control, go through the list. For anything within your control, write out plans of action and then you can include them in your dress rehearsal, by the way. You can include them in your visualization and your coffee shop story. But decide in advance how you're going to handle things that come up.

And I want you to keep asking yourself, what is the worst thing that can happen? Because usually the answer is I won't finish the race, okay? Like

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99% of the time the answer is, but I won't finish the race. And when we put it like that, it's like, okay, well, it's just a race. You're not on trial for a murder that you didn't commit if you don't finish the race. It's just if you don't finish, you're going to be disappointed.

But you're going to be just fine because here's the thing, right? Most of our anxiety isn't really about not finishing, or coming in last, okay? Those are circumstances. The anxiety is about how we think we will feel if that happens. So let me repeat that louder for the people in the back. Your anxiety isn't really about not finishing or coming in last, it is about how you think you will feel if that happens.

And this is good news for you. So you have to decide in advance, and you can do this, what you're going to think and feel about yourself if the "worst that can happen" actually comes true. Because whatever happens on race day does not take away from all the training you put in, doesn't make you any less of a runner. It's simply a result. It's simply a thing that happened. You're still an awesome person. You're still a real runner. You're still a badass.

So if your fearful thought is I might come in last, right? What's the worst that could happen? I could come in last. Ask yourself why that's so terrible. Because the truth is, somebody always comes in last. That is the nature of a race. That's how races work. And the only problem with being last is what you make it mean about yourself.

And if you make it mean that you're a failure, of course you're going to be worried about that happening. But is coming in last really a failure? Even not finishing the race, is that really a failure? Because if you came in last, you finished. If you didn't finish the race, you still trained for it, you still showed up.

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You cannot control every single thing that happens. And there may be some races that you don't finish. There may be some races that you come in last. But making that mean that you've done something wrong, that you have failed, if you make failure mean like, oh well, I failed, let's try it again. That's not a big deal. But if you make failure mean that you're just worthless, that you're a loser, that's super, super painful.

So decide in advance what you want to make this worst case outcome mean. And if you're making it mean that you're a shit person, let's evaluate some other things that you can think about, okay? Because race day anxiety is literally worrying about emotions you might feel in the future, right? You're like, I'm worried about coming in last because if I come in last, I'm gonna feel terrible.

So you're not really worried about coming in last. You're worried about, how can I bear the way I'm going to feel about myself if I come in last, okay? So you're literally worrying about emotions you might possibly feel in the future. Emotions such as shame, disappointment, embarrassment. And this is flawed logic because the circumstance of you coming in last, the circumstance of you not finishing the race or whatever, doesn't cause those emotions. It's your thoughts about those circumstances.

So decide in advance how you want to think about all the possible things that could happen, especially those worst case scenarios. Write down what you want to think about it, practice it, make your plans, do your visualization, take control of your thinking, rather than letting it happen to you. Okay? And if you do this, not only will you have a better race and a better training cycle, you're going to feel so much better throughout that process.

You can apply this to anywhere in your life where you're worried and stressed out about a future outcome, okay? And this does not mean that things are going to turn out rainbows and daisies. And it doesn't mean that

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if you don't finish the race, you're going to be like, oh well, there's always another one. Right? But you know in advance that you can handle it.

I think that is our biggest fear, is like, if this happens I'm going to feel so awful, I can't handle it. You can handle a little disappointment, right? And then you can reframe it and talk yourself through how you're going to come back. So again, this is not some kind of Pollyanna make the most of a situation that sucks. No, this is deciding in advance how you're going to think about it. Know that you can handle a little bit of disappointment. Know that it's just a race, there's always another one. Okay?

And you can handle it. You are strong. You are. I know you are. You're strong, you're smart, and you have the tools that you need. Okay? So knowing in advance that you can handle it is going to lift that burden from you that allows you to show up for your training, and your race and your life in a whole new way. All right? Now, get your ass out there and slay that race.

All right, my friend, that is it for this episode. If you enjoyed it, please share it, especially on Instagram. And as always, I love you, stay safe and get your ass out there and run. I'll 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](https://runyourbestlife.com) to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.