

So you Want to Start Running?

Dos and Don'ts from Dr Juliet McGrattan

Starting to run isn't easy. Sure, putting one foot in front of another isn't hard to do, but doing it over and over again for a prolonged period of time IS. There are so many pitfalls and it's really easy to get it wrong and not want to run again.

Here are some important dos and don'ts, many of which I speak about from experience; there's nothing like learning the hard way!

Don't – get over excited

You're all fired up with enthusiasm. Wonderful! You have the shoes and you're raring to go. Excellent! You've seen everyone else around you completing challenges and you quickly sign yourself up for a half marathon in four weeks' time so you have a goal. Uh-oh!

Do – be realistic

Whilst having a goal is a great way to keep you motivated and on track, choose something that is achievable. Going from zero to half marathon is totally possible but not in four weeks. A good beginner running programme will take you a minimum of 8 weeks but might take 13 or 14, to reach a distance of 5k. 5k is a perfect distance to set as your first target. A parkrun would be ideal as all abilities are welcome and they're free. Keep a diary so you can track your progress, you will love reading it back one day when you are an experienced runner.



Don't – be a speed demon

You head out of the door, start running up the street as fast as you can. Before you've reached the end of the road you feel as if you might spontaneously combust, can't get your breath and head back home having decided running isn't for you after all.

Do – run at the speed of chat

You'd think when you set out, that your priority would be to learn to run faster but it's actually much better to learn to run slowly.

If you can talk while you're running, then you will be at a pace that you can maintain for longer. This may be little more than a trot but that is fine. The ideal way is to use a run/walk pattern where you intersperse short bouts of running with recovery walks. Over time the running sections get longer and the walks shorter until miraculously all the running bits join up and you are continuously running.

The NHS Couch to 5K app takes you through the process gradually over nine weeks. The app tells you when to run and walk and motivates you along the way.

When you want to go further, just go a bit slower. There will always be what we call the '**toxic ten minutes**' when your body is adjusting to the demands of running and it feels horrible. That will happen, whatever distance you run. Just know that it does go away and that once you get beyond it then running is so much easier.

Don't – do it on your own

At any one time there will be hundreds of other people in the early stages of learning to run too. You can learn so much from other people's experiences and mistakes. Remember that everyone was a beginner once.



Do – find your tribe

There is so much support out there for you. This may be a friend to learn to run with or the beginners session at a local running club. It may be a community on social media such as UKRunChat or 261 Fearless. There is no need to do this on your own. Of course, you can if you want to, but all of us need a bit of encouragement from time to time. Runners are a friendly bunch and I'm always amazed at the outpouring of support for runners of all abilities online.

Don't – expect to just get better and better

It's easy to assume that you'll just get faster and faster and be able to go for longer and longer with every run – that's what training is about isn't it? Well, this isn't true and your expectations will be quickly dashed.

Do – look at the bigger picture

Everyone has bad runs when they just feel heavy and slow, or even bad weeks; no matter how experienced a runner you are. It's just life. Sometimes you'll be able to explain it and put it down to a busy week at work. At other times there isn't an obvious explanation. Move on. Do make sure you aren't running every day when you're first setting out. Your body needs time to adapt to the new training load that you're putting on it. Every other day is a better idea or have two days a week when you don't run.



Don't – think that running is all you need to do

You want to run so you'd think that all you need to do is lots of running, right? Surely it's better to focus on one activity at a time? Not true, there's so much to be gained from not running.

Do – mix it up

It's a good idea to do something other than running too. Cross-training is basically choosing another sport to do alongside. Swimming and cycling make great partners to running because they are low impact and give your joints a rest. They're also great for cardiovascular fitness and for strengthening other muscles that aren't used during running. Pilates, weights or a home workout to improve your core strength and build muscle will really benefit your running. It's easier to run efficiently and with good technique if your core is strong.

Don't – underestimate the power of your mind

Running is a physical activity, there's no doubt about that but your mental attitude plays a large part in your success. When you are doing something that makes you feel uncomfortable, your natural reaction is to stop. When you want to run however, you have to push through that. Your mind needs training as much as your legs do. The mental strength gained from running is one of the amazing things about running and you shouldn't underestimate it.

Do – learn to ignore the running gremlins

So many times you'll hear voices in your head that yell at you to stop and convince you that you are not a runner and that going home would be the best solution. These are just running gremlins and they are there on every hill, every horizon and lurking behind every bush. Have a selection of pre-prepared replies to throw back at them and they will eventually go away. Know that they are normal. Know that you can do it and that you are a runner. Keep putting one foot in front of the other and just stamp on those gremlins if they won't shut up.

Dr Juliet McGrattan is author of: **'Sorted - the active woman's guide to health'** A treasure chest of knowledge and wisdom, this book covers everything you need to know about the physicality of being a woman. Packed with information that is clear, helpful and practical, readers stated that the book is "inspiring and motivational" and that "some of the information is quite literally life-changing".

You can also visit Juliet's blog at: drjulietmcgrattan.com

