

## Loving What You're Doing

I was struck by a conversation I recently had with a friend. Once a highly competitive athlete, he now runs just a few low-key road races a year, but trains day-in and day-out year round. One of his comments to me was, “Ugh, now I have to go do my run.” There was a note of dread in his voice as he talked about having to go home so he could do his daily run.

My response back to him was, “If you don't want to run, then don't run. No one is making you do it.”

“No, I need to do it,” was his only response. How unfortunate that he doesn't *want* to run but, rather, feels like he *has* to run.



Have you ever felt like this—where you are not at all looking forward to your workout whether it is running, lifting, swimming, cycling, or some other fitness activity? Experiencing these feelings on an infrequent basis is fairly typical of most athletes; it is unrealistic to expect yourself to be enthused, excited, and motivated every time you lace up your running shoes to go for a run. However, if you find that you are experiencing these feelings on a consistent basis, it may be time for you to take a closer look and perhaps implement strategies to bring the joy and enjoyment back to your running (or chosen sport/exercise activity). You will eventually be worn down if you are continually fighting these feelings of “not wanting to run, but making yourself do it.”

### Strategies

The question lingers—what can be done to address and attempt to alter these negative feelings? I'll offer two possible strategies. One strategy relates

to getting back to the roots of your running. That is, you need to get back to why you began running. Think for a minute about some of the reasons influencing your decision to be “a runner.” Most athletes will list some of the following reasons as being factors influencing their decision to exercise—which of these rings true for you? What additional reasons were important for you that aren't included in this list?

### *I run...*

- Because I enjoy the solitude of running
- To get or stay in shape
- To achieve health benefits such as decreased weight and cardiovascular fitness
- To be with friends or meet new people
- Because it enhances how I feel about myself
- To help me manage stress in my life
- To compete/achieve performance goals
- To improve my physical appearance

Your primary reasons for running need to be brought back to the forefront to remind you of the real reasons you are running. Write your reasons for running on a note card and post it somewhere where you will see it every day. Let it serve as a much needed reminder that you don't *have* to run but you choose to run to achieve specific results (i.e., to lose weight, to deal with work stress). For example, when you get up in the morning for your run, take a look at your list to remind yourself why you are getting up at 5:30am. This should help quiet the little voice telling you how good it would feel to get back in bed. Your note card containing your "reasons for running" gives meaning and joy to your athletic pursuits.

A second strategy (that may seem somewhat counter to the first recommended strategy) relates to "letting go" of goals and just having some fun on a run or workout activity. While having a purpose or goal to daily workouts is beneficial and productive, there are times when it is equally beneficial to "just run." Don't worry about how far, how fast, or how long you are running. Just go out for a run and allow yourself to enjoy it without the pressure of having to do a certain workout or maintain a set pace. Some specific ideas as to how this can be achieved and how you can enjoy what you're doing include:

### Take off your watch

A novel concept for runners as they are typically tied to their watch—this will take out of the equation the measure of "how fast" you are running. Go at whatever pace you want; don't worrying about how your time compares to the last time you did this loop or how long you ran.

### Variety is the spice of life

Avoid your "typical" running loops or paths by running somewhere you have never run before. Blaze new running trails or find different streets to run on and be sure to enjoy the new scenery. You can also add variety and enjoyment by creating a new workout.

### Make it social

Once a week, plan to run with a friend or a running group to make it a social run. Focus on sharing with others rather than focusing on where, how fast, and how far you are running.

### Cross train

If you don't feel like running, don't run and instead go for a bike ride, swim, lift weights, play tennis, or hike. Many similar physical, mental and health benefits can be realized through cross-training. Additionally, it can give you a needed mental break from running and a break from pounding the pavement.

### Make a game out of it

Use your creativity and make a mental or physical game out of your run. A teammate of mine created a running game she used when running on a golf course in the early morning. Running in no particular direction or order, she would do "pick ups" between every hole and tee and try to guess the length of the hole (what a great workout as well). Another friend would play the license plate game when running on city streets. Creating such games gives new energy to runs.

### Take time-out

Interpret running as a break from the stresses and hassles of the day. Instead of running posing an additional stress of something you *have* to do, approach it as a healthful strategy to help you manage stress from work, school, responsibilities, etc. Let running serve as a much needed break or time-out from the real stresses of life.

## Conclusion

Exercise, physical fitness, and, for many of you, athletic performance are undoubtedly important. You have made a commitment to your physical pursuits, but it is not always easy. There are times when running is perceived as a burden—an additional stress. With some work, you can modify these feelings of dread and lack of enjoyment regarding running by implementing some of the strategies identified in this article. Make a commitment to bring back some of the joy to your running.

### About the Author

*Suzie Tuffey Riewald received her Master's and PhD in Sport Psychology/Exercise Science from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. She has worked for USA Swimming as the Sport Psychology and Sport Science Director, and now is Associate Director of Coaching with the USOC where she works with various sport national governing bodies (NGBs) to develop and enhance coaching education and training. Additionally, Suzie is an NSCA-Certified Personal Trainer.*