

A Few Rules To Run By

By Mark Remy
Runner's World

Running is simple.

You don't need a room full of pricey equipment or to phone in advance for a tee time. Running doesn't even require much skill — nothing could be easier. Naturally, there are tons of rules. Not for the act of running itself, but about the code, largely unspoken, that governs behavior and informs decisions in situations that every runner encounters sooner or later: Did that driver really just cut me off, and am I within my rights to flip him the bird? What do I tell a marathoner lurching along at mile 20 like a zombie in search of brains? Here are some answers to such quandaries. None of these are rules in the USA Track & Field Competition Rules Book, because you won't find rules there on passing gas during a group run. Instead, these are guidelines to make running a little bit happier, healthier, and more fun for everyone. Because the first rule of running is just that: Have fun.

Have Fun

No other fact is so fundamental to running: Done properly, running is fun. Even when you do it improperly, running is still inherently, liberatingly fun. If you doubt this, just spend a few minutes watching a child or a dog in any wide open space. Their glee is instinctual and undeniable. I believe it was Aristotle who said, "Tramps like us, baby, we were born to run." Enjoy it. After all, there aren't many animal impulses that we can act on in public without getting arrested.

Expand Your Sense of Fun

As a runner, your definition of fun — which might once have included water parks, screwball comedies on DVD, and scrapbooking — must be, well, let's just say broadened and might include:

- Waking up at 5:30 a.m. to run 10 miles
- Running in blistering heat
- Running in the rain
- Running in 400-meter circles
- Feeling as if your lungs are about to explode
- Paying good money for the privilege of turning your toenails black
- Any combination of the above
- Running can hurt. One writer gets to the bottom of why she runs

Black Toenails Are Badges of Honor

Run long enough and you'll wind up ruining a toenail or two. Whether it's because your shoes are too big or too small or because you've run a race with punishing downhills or the toenail gods happen to be in a foul mood, someday you will peel off your socks and see black where once there was pink. Congratulations! These bruised nails are tiny trophies conferred upon you for toughing it out. Just don't flash them in public.

Run Like a Dog

My dog, a shepherd mix named Cooper, doesn't care where we are or what time of day it is, or even what the weather is like. He doesn't know what his resting heart rate is and rarely bothers to wear a watch. He just loves to run. And every time he does, his face and his body telegraph one simple message: This. Is. AWESOME. I'm runningrunningrunningrunning!

The "Run Like a Dog" Workout (Including Warmup and Cooldown) Walk 8 seconds. Trot 4 seconds. Stop. Sniff. Sprint 7 seconds. Freeze. Walk 5 seconds in any direction but forward. Stare 9 seconds. Lunge at rabbit. Double back, walk 3 seconds. Urinate. Repeat six times. Collapse on rug.

Let Angry Motorists Go

I understand the impulse when a driver has just pulled out in front of you or turned directly in your path or otherwise behaved like a jerk. I know how much you'd love to slap the trunk of that driver's car, or shout at the person behind the wheel, helpfully suggesting that he or she "learn to drive." Or extend a certain digit in a certain direction. Do yourself — and all runners — a favor and fight that impulse. Smile. Your lashing out isn't likely to change the driver's behavior, and may, in fact, worsen it. For all you know, the still-seething guy may drive extra close to the next runner he sees, just to make a point. Let him go.

Learn how to protect yourself when running on the road.

The Open-Ended Question Is Your Friend

Running with someone who's faster than you? Is this person oblivious to your gasping? If so, it's time to deploy that surefire weapon of struggling runners everywhere: Ask the offending speedster a question so broad, he or she could spend 10 minutes answering it. And just might! This is particularly useful on long hills.

"Say, how's the job?"

"Any vacation plans this year?"

"Popular culture: How about it, huh?"

For Pete's Sake, Stand Still at Red Lights

Sharks die when they stop moving. Runners do not. Keep this in mind next time you encounter a don't walk sign at a busy intersection. There's no need to jog in place or dance from foot to foot like you have to pee. Just chill. Wait a few moments. Note: If a nonrunner waiting with you at the crosswalk is dancing from foot to foot, he or she may indeed have to pee. Give this person wide berth.

Learn and Love The Farmer's Blow

Mastering the farmer's blow (or snot rocket) is a must for any runner. Here's how to do it right: Breathe in through your mouth, like you're gasping. Lay a forefinger against one nostril and compress firmly. Purse your lips. Cock your head slightly in the direction of the open nostril and exhale forcefully through your nose. Repeat with opposite nostril, if needed.

"Lookin' Good!"... and Other Runners' Lies

Lying is not something we normally endorse. But it's perfectly acceptable to tell a runner that he is looking good at mile 19 of a marathon when, in fact, he looks like an insomniac who's trying to sneeze, and is confused because someone has switched his running shoes with replicas made of concrete. The go-to lie is "Lookin' good!" Or you could say, "If I weren't so awed by the apparent ease with which you're navigating this course, I might be angry with you for nearly knocking me unconscious with your very awesomeness!" The key is to say something. Even a zombie appreciates encouragement.

Running Rules of Thumb

1. If you see a porta potty with no line, use it. Even if you don't need to.
2. If you have to ask yourself, Does this driver see me? The answer is no.
3. If you have to ask yourself, Are these shorts too short? The answer is yes.
4. 1 glazed doughnut = 2 miles

5. You rarely regret the runs you do; you almost always regret the runs you skip.
6. Not everyone who looks fast really is, and not everyone who looks slow really is.
7. Nobody has ever watched Chariots of Fire from beginning to end. Not even the people who made it.
8. You can never have too many safety pins on your gym bag.
9. Running any given route in the rain makes you feel 50 percent more hard-core than covering the same route on a sunny day.
10. If you care even a little about being called a jogger versus a runner, you're a runner.

Pass Gas, not Judgment

Runners ingest a fair amount of healthy foods, which produce gas in the GI tract, where it cannot stay forever. Especially when that GI tract is bounced and jostled. Passing gas while running is excusable and inevitable, but... You may not mock another runner for having passed gas, unless he has previously mocked you for the same or unless he mocks himself. If a runner has taken pains to mask flatulence, pretend nothing happened. It's fun to pretend that the gas you expelled is propelling you forward, like a little booster rocket. That isn't really a guideline, though, is it?

Never Leave a Man Behind... Unless He Insists He's Okay With It

It's fine to ask once or twice if a straggler is okay or if he wants you to slow down for him. Asking three or more times, however, is more likely to annoy than to help. Take the straggler at his word and run accordingly.

Smile at Your Critics

A few people will never miss a chance to tear running down, or jab its adherents in the chest with a rhetorical finger. Oddly enough, the most vocal of such critics are often in terrible health themselves.

"Bad for your joints," they'll jab.

"You'll get arthritis," they'll jab.

"Running marathons?" they'll ask, jab-bingly, between sips of their Big Gulp. "That'll kill ya."

The best response is to continue running and loving it. Meantime, try inviting these critics to join you for a short run. Who knows? Maybe someday they'll accept your invitation.

Runners Do Not Shave Their Legs

Exceptions include most North American women; runners about to undergo some sort of leg surgery; runners who are competitive swimmers, cyclists, or triathletes; and runners who don't care what anyone thinks because they just like the way smooth legs feel, especially against cotton sheets, and anyway, what's the big deal?

A PR Is a PR Forever, But...

You may advertise a personal record (PR) time, or otherwise claim it as your own with no further explanation for two years after setting it. After two years, however, it becomes uncool to tell people, "My marathon PR is 3:12" without providing a disclaimer — e.g., "My marathon PR is 3:12, but I ran that 63 years ago."

Remove Your Hat for The National Anthem

Manners and common courtesy apply even for a race and even if your hat is made of technical sweat-wicking fabrics.

When Elastic Is Gone, Man, It Is Gone

Men, this one is for you. You paid good money for those shorts. You love those shorts. You've raced in those shorts. But sooner or later you will pull them on and feel roomy gaping where once there was a snug liner. This means that the elastic down there has gone slack. You will be tempted to wear them anyway. Don't.

Never Miss a Chance To Thank a Volunteer

Even if you're running the race of your life, you can still manage a bit of eye contact and a nod as you grab a cup of water from an outstretched hand. Even if it feels like your quads are quite literally on fire, you can manage to sputter a short "thanks" to the course marshal standing in the intersection. It will make the volunteer feel good. And you, too.

Before You Remove Your New Running Shoes From the Box, You Must Smell Them

Open the box. Peel back the tissue paper. Behold those pristine shoes. Then lift the box to your face and breathe deeply. Mmmm. Smells like potential. And possibly toxins. But mostly potential.

Adapted from *The Runner's Rule Book*, by Mark Remy (Rodale). To order your copy, go to runnersrulebook.com/mag.