

Stop Bugging Me

How to deal with hecklers, crowded paths, foul smells, and other runner irritants.

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As a runner with more on your mind than how fast and far you're going, you want to get in your mileage without being irritated by a guy on a neighboring [treadmill](#) shouting on his iPhone or heckled by an immature driver. Here's how to overcome common annoyances and get back in your blissed-out zone.

The Annoyance: CHATTY CATHYS (OR CARLS)

Runners are like cats and dogs, says Adam Krajchir, founder and director of Race with Purpose and head coach for [New York Road Runners' Team for Kids](#). Cat runners just want to be left alone to do their thing. Dog runners want to be social. You may be cat or dog on any given day, but it's never fun being a cat stuck in a dog world, especially if you're trapped on the treadmill.

THE SOLUTION: Block or Move

If you're in the gym, headphones are your first line of defense, even if you're not really using them. "I've brought headphones and inserted the earbuds even when I'm not [listening to music](#)," says endurance-running coach Brendan Cournane. Dealing with the talker outside? "Try to focus on [running form](#) or the purpose of the workout that day," he says. You can also use this time to conveniently do an interval workout that leads away from Mr. Mouth. Or ask him to pipe down. (See "Quiet, Please," below, for the best way to assert yourself.)

The Annoyance: HECKLERS

Runners encounter taunts of "Run, Forrest! Run!" (yes, even 17 years after a young Forrest Gump ran across theater screens) or angry gesticulations from drivers who refuse to budge an inch. Sometimes women runners are downright harassed. Tom Raymond, of New York City, says he knows he'll hear "some remark about the shorts" whenever he wears track shorts on distance runs. "I definitely notice a relationship between the length of my running shorts and the chance of getting heckled," says Raymond, who also recalls being squirted with a water gun by someone in a passing SUV. Not fun, but it's much better to be squirted with water than to have ketchup packets thrown at you, which happened to another member of his running group. While he's always startled by honks and shouts, Raymond usually ignores rude comments, although he admits, "I did shout some choice words at the SUV as it drove away."

THE SOLUTION: Spin It

Instead of taking the bait and shouting back, use the other's rudeness for your gain. "Take negative things and spin it," says Krajchir. "See it as a compliment, that it means, I'm doing something that they can't do. I'm doing exactly what I should be doing."

The Annoyance: GROUP RUNNERS

Traffic's bad enough on the highway. But during a crowded race on a tight course? Brutal. It's not easy to concentrate on form and breathing if your path is blocked by a group of runners (or walkers!) striding three or more abreast.

THE SOLUTION: Be Verbal

"Most runners are considerate when runners approaching from behind call out, 'Coming through!'" says Cournane. If they don't listen, be a little sneaky. "I approach from behind and when close, I ask, 'How is your race going?'" says the running coach. "Typically, they'll turn their inner shoulder toward you to look, which creates a gap you can slip through." Krajchir also suggests doing your homework before signing up for a race. "If your goal is to PR, pick the races where you know you're going to have open room to run," he says. If you chose a popular run, on the other hand, go out to have fun. You'll get frustrated otherwise.

The Annoyance: B.O. AND WORSE

Of course people sweat when they run. You do, too. But some runners emit worse smells than others, especially if they dig garlic-y foods, are trying to quit smoking through running, or are wearing gear that hasn't been washed.

THE SOLUTION: Tact or Dab

Good friends can be tactfully approached. Otherwise, the best thing you can do is move away. Another trick if this person is always at the gym the same time you are, or they're part of your running group: Overpower the funky odor by applying a dab of menthol rub under your nose before your run, says Krajchir. (Scented lip balms can work, too.)

The Annoyance: YOUR INNER QUITTER

Amber Forbes battles with her inner monologue when she runs. Constantly. "I try to not think about the fact that I'm dragging or that my shin is aching," says the Brick, New Jersey, native. "Sometimes I find I'm trying to convince myself not to stop."

THE SOLUTION: Find a Mantra

"Realize you have control over your thoughts, not the other way around," says Laura Hayden, a counseling professor at the University of Massachusetts, Boston and president of the Greater Boston Track Club. Try creating a "thought-stoppage trigger," which is a phrase you whip out when your brain's getting in the way of your run. (Hayden's is "Whoa, Nelly.") Follow immediately with a positive mantra like, "Saddle up." "It needs to be true, positive, forward-thinking, and a verb," she says. And keep at it. Mental workouts can be just as important as physical ones to tamp down your inner distraction. Find more mantra power at [runners world.com/mantras](http://runnersworld.com/mantras).

Quiet, Please

Telling a loud treadmill neighbor to shut the #\$*& up isn't the best way to get him to actually do so.

Anne Post, of the Emily Post Institute, says it's best to be direct. "Don't walk up to the person and say, 'If you don't mind, could you turn it down just a little bit on your cell phone?' when you really want them to hang up," she says.

Instead, make eye contact, smile, and in a calm, nonaccusatory tone say: "Would you please hop off the cell phone? It's really distracting." Usually, the even-yet-firm approach will work, she says.

If not, well, you can go with shut the #\$*& up—just keep in mind that you may have to run out of the gym.