

Beating The Training Blues

“After years and years of running, the act of putting one foot in front of the other, mile after mile, gets pretty damn boring,” Australian marathoner Derek Clayton once observed.

At some point, nearly all of us have run in Clayton’s shoes. As anyone who has been running for years will tell you, there are times when going out for a run can be as appealing as a two-hour stint in the dentist’s chair.

Come on, admit it. The running life can become one of unabated drudgery if you allow yourself to fall into a deady-dull routine, mindlessly covering the same routine in every session.

Here then are four tips to put the zest back into your running.

1. Run for time, not miles

Stop worrying about miles. Mileage mania ties you to a few routes that you run over and over again, simply because you know how far you are running and it makes it easier to record it in your log. So punch your watch as you head out of the door and just go wherever your impulses dictate.

Experiment. Try something new each day, even if it’s only a few twists and turns to make the route different. People who run solely by miles tend to cover the same courses over and over, and become stale.

2. Get back to nature

If you don’t do it already, it’s time to mix off-road forays into your regular road routines, even if it means driving out into the country. Do it at least once a week, and run for time only.

Many of us work in offices, surrounded by glass and concrete, chattering machines and harried people. But you don’t have to run enclosed by all the same trappings of modern life. Lose yourself in nature and run for the sheer joy of it.

3. Use the whole day

If you usually run after work, then once a week run early in the morning or at lunchtime. Admittedly, setting up a regular time and place is efficient, and probably as essential as any single factor in keeping you running. It means you don’t have to think about it or make plans. You just run every day at six o’clock or whenever; it’s as regular as trudging to the bathroom every morning.

Don’t change your basic routine. But occasionally – once a week, a few times a month, whenever – run at the opposite end of the day’s cycle.

Research shows that physical performance tends to peak in the late afternoon or evening. Running in the evening is more likely to leave you with the feeling that running really is working. On the other hand, runners who run in the morning tend to miss fewer sessions, because reasons not to run accumulate as the day goes on. Morning runners tend to feel more satisfied as a consequence.

4. Give the training log a rest

As long as you are compulsively logging every mile, you’ll have difficulty taking advantage of different options. The mere thought or recording ‘DNR’ or ‘rest day’ in your log is likely to elevate your stress levels to eye-popping levels. For a while, just run. You will stay as fit, and be less a prisoner of your running.

There are plenty of coaches around who will tell you that four days of training a week is adequate for racing fitness – that is, if you do one long run and one set of intervals or hills.

If you want to stick with your diary, record how you felt instead of how much you did. Running, ideally, is something you do with your head as well as with your legs.

None of this should be taken as evidence of weakness, betrayal or lack of commitment. You are still a runner. It's still a major part of your identity.

Taking the occasional break, or trying something new, will simply help to keep it that way.