



# Running Basics: Group Versus Solo Training

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Once you've got running [form](#), [terrain](#), [elevation](#) and [distance](#) down and a [race](#) is in your future, you should start to play with running with a group. Do you prefer running in a group or flying solo? According to running coaches, whether you train alone or with others is a personal preference, though there's something to be said for utilizing a mix of both. "I think using a group for key workouts and long runs and running solo on the other days makes the most sense," says Debra Cookson, a RRCA-certified running coach with [Sugar Runs](#).

No matter what you prefer, there are benefits and drawbacks to both running styles. Ahead, veteran coaches share their expertise, plus how to make both approaches work for you.

[Run clubs and crews](#) are more popular than ever, and there are plenty of reasons runners of all levels enjoy training with a group.

1

## THERE'S AN INCENTIVE TO SHOW UP AND DO YOUR BEST

"One of the biggest advantages to group running is accountability," Cookson explains. "If others are waiting for you, you are more likely to show up. By the same token, those around you motivate you to run a little faster or a little further or just keep up." For those trying to push through a pace plateau, this can be especially helpful.

2

## THEY'RE GREAT FOR A VARIETY OF GOALS

"Many groups offer basic coaching for beginners and training groups for popular races and race distances," notes Steve Carmichael, founder of [RunBuzz](#) and a USATF- and RRCA-certified running coach. Groups are often filled with experienced runners willing to help newer runners get started, he adds.

There may be other perks, too. "Many groups work with area health professionals like physical therapists, dietitians and more," Carmichael says. This can be useful when you're training for something specific and need specialized advice.

3



## IT'S MORE THAN JUST A WORKOUT

Many runners love training in a group for a simple reason: It's fun. "Since running is a common interest of everyone in the group, being part of one can lead to lifelong friendships and running partners," Carmichael points out.

While there are undoubtedly benefits to joining a group, there are also some potential downsides.

1

## IT CAN BE NERVE-WRACKING AT FIRST

Putting yourself out there can be hard. "Joining a running group can be intimidating for new runners or those who are not used to running with others," Carmichael says. The good news: "Most groups welcome new runners and really want you to join them!"

2

## THE PACE MIGHT NOT BE QUITE RIGHT FOR YOU

Depending on the group size, there may not be other runners who are planning to run at your pace. Of course, you could run faster than you originally planned. "This may be OK if you need an occasional push, but it could lead to overuse injuries if you run too hard, too fast, too often," Carmichael notes. "On the other hand, running too slow all the time could lead to plateaus due to lack of challenge."

"Many runners feel pressured to run faster when around others," Cookson adds. Striking the right balance ultimately comes down to finding the right group to train with.

The key to getting the most out of your group runs is to be upfront about your training goals and desired pace.

"Communicate with your group on what the intent of the run is up front. If everyone agrees, then do the planned pace," Cookson advises. "Otherwise, separate into smaller groups or run solo in between the two pace groups. It's important to be honest with yourself and train within your potential, not someone else's abilities."

Many people run alone most of the time. Again, it's easy to see why:

1

## IT'S QUALITY ALONE TIME

Some people practice mindfulness, others run. (And of course, some people do both.) "Solo running can feel meditative or offer respite from the daily hustle," Cookson points out. "For many, solo running is their only "me" time, which is absolutely necessary for a healthy mind and body."



2

## YOU GET A CHANCE TO PRACTICE SELF-PACING

“Solo running allows you an opportunity to focus on self-pacing and race day strategy without distraction,” Cookson says. “Not every race will have pacers, and understanding how to pace yourself is easier to do when it has been practiced without the assistance of a group. It’s a great way to practice mental techniques to get you through the toughest parts of racing.”

3

## IT’S EASIER TO “TUNE IN”

You’ve probably heard the advice to ‘listen to your body’ when running. That’s much easier to do when you’re alone, Cookson says. “Knowing what your body is experiencing at different stages of the run is important. Often, the small aches and niggles are muted when we are surrounded by distractions and conversations.” It may also be easier to pay attention to your form and breathing when you’re on your own.

There aren’t many downsides to running alone, but there are a couple of factors you may want to consider:

1

## IT’S NOT ALWAYS EXCITING

“Solo running may seem boring, particularly for longer runs,” Cookson says. For some, this quiet time may be precious, but for others, feeling bored and alone can make it more difficult to stick to a training schedule.

2

## YOU MAY LACK MOTIVATION

If you tend to stop when your run gets tough, solo running may not be the right choice for you. “Great running partners encourage and push each other when tired,” Carmichael says. Having a running partner or group can keep you accountable, especially on those cold or rainy mornings when you may want to sleep in instead.

The most important thing you can do when running alone is prioritize [your safety](#). “Be aware of your surroundings, which could mean leaving your earbuds at home,” Cookson says. “Make sure to run in a well-known or well-lit area,” she adds. Cookson also recommends bringing a phone with you on your run, and letting someone else know where you’re running and when you plan to be finished.

Her other rule of thumb? “Never assume that a vehicle’s driver sees you.” Wearing reflective gear, bright clothing and/or a headlamp or carrying a flashlight when running at night is also useful.



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