



# How Runners Build Mental Fortitude

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When you're new to running, training and racing can be filled with highs and lows. Progress can be dramatic and encouraging but having a difficult run can be discouraging when you don't have the experience to realize it's just a tiny blip in the big picture of your training.

Building mental fortitude as a beginner requires a multi-pronged approach. While experienced runners may gain mental strength through long, hard workouts and holding a challenging pace, beginner runners need a different technique.

Learning to train and race requires a consistent effort, a sense of humor and recognition "failure" is just an opportunity to learn and try again.

## 1 TRAIN CONSISTENTLY TO PRACTICE WITH DISCOMFORT

One of the biggest challenges facing new runners is getting out the door and finding time to squeeze in a workout. Our lives are often busy and hectic, and we need to plan our training time every day to make it happen.

Once the novelty of a new plan wears off or your progress hits a [temporary plateau](#), it's easy to lose motivation. When the weather is less than ideal, getting out to run can be especially daunting. But this is where mental fortitude begins. It doesn't start with crazy fast workouts or hill repeats — it starts with getting out the door *consistently*, even when you don't feel like it.

For beginner and advanced runners alike, it's important never to judge a run by the first mile. If you're tired or trying to fit in your workout when it's cold and dark, that first mile can be a tough one.

But embrace it! Know it's OK to feel stiff or cranky, but also know that will likely change as the run progresses. Consistency helps you gain confidence, so persevere through the tough times to experience the good ones.

## 2 TAKE RUNNING LIGHTLY

While it may seem counter-intuitive, a light-hearted approach to running can help you continue to build mental strength. Remember there are only a tiny percentage of runners who do this professionally. The rest of us are in it to push ourselves beyond our comfort zone and have fun.

Challenges can be expected at all levels of running, but may feel especially intimidating when you don't have a large bank of experience to draw from. While social media can make it difficult not to compare yourself with others, do your best to focus on your own progress. Surround yourself with those who support and encourage your new endeavors.



When you allow yourself to have a sense of humor about your running, it's easier to try new things. Whether it's running in a downpour or trying a trail race, staying open to new experiences is what leads to growth. Every runner is an individual and will experience progress at a different rate, so always try to keep it light and have fun along the way.

### 3 "FAIL" WITH OPEN ARMS

Consistent running and openness to new challenges allows you to tackle the next component of mental fortitude: learning to "fail" with open arms. "Failure" is a dirty word for most of us. We set goals and want to accomplish them. But progress is not always a straight line. While you may find yourself making unexpected and rapid progress, there will also be times when nothing seems to go as planned.

There's a Japanese proverb that speaks to the mindset required to persevere in the midst of challenges — roughly translated it means "Fall down seven times, get up eight." It doesn't matter how many times you fail in running (or in life), as long as you get yourself back up to try again.

When you're a beginner, it's especially important to translate failure into learning. Rather than be discouraged, learn what you can from the experience and move forward. Mentally it can be helpful to contemplate (with a little humor), "What's the worst that can happen?" Usually even the "worst case" scenarios are not the end of the world, so allow yourself the courage to try.

### 4 WELCOME THE CHALLENGES OF RACING

As you continue to build your mental fortitude in training, racing can be a safe way to continue pushing outside your comfort zone. Races can be an intimidating experience on many levels if they are new to you, especially if you don't have a more experienced friend to guide you through the process.

Local races can be a great place to start, as they may be less intimidating than a big-city race with thousands of people. Always allow yourself much more time than you think you'll need, as parking, registration and bathroom lines almost always take longer than you expect. Even if you tend to be a solo runner, try to embrace the social aspects of racing. You're likely to find many supportive and like-minded individuals.

Once you cross the starting line, embrace the experience. Have confidence in the mental and physical strength you have built through your training, and enjoy the process. It may be hard, and a little uncomfortable, but nothing worth achieving comes without effort.