

Newsletter

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What's a Penguin?

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In the running lexicon, the word "Penguin" has come to mean a person who runs more for the joy of running than for recognition and public rewards. Some of us are perpetual Penguins. We are consumed by the pleasure of movement.

Other Penguins find their joy in the challenge of reaching their own potential, whatever that is. For some it has meant running the Boston Marathon, the only U.S. marathon that has qualifying standards. For others, it has meant finding an independence and freedom in their daily runs that expands their limits.

Can there be such a thing, then, as a Penguin athlete? Or an athletic Penguin? Can people who are fighting to lose thirty or forty pounds be athletes? Of course they can! Can people who have waited until their forties to become physically active be athletes? You bet. Can people who finish last in a race be athletes? Yes, they can. And yes, they are.

You might be a penguin if...

- you have to politely (for the third time) tell the men in the policecar moving behind you that **No** you do not wish a ride.
- you wear your jog bra on top of your singlet. This is especially true if you are male.
- during a race, you keep turning around to see if there is still anybody behind you.
- the rest of the pack is out of sight before you've run 100 yards.
- you meet both the hare AND the tortoise running back towards you doing their cool-down after a race.
- the only reason you don't drop out of a race is that you're embarrassed that the police in the car behind you (closing the course) will see you.
- as you're rounding the corner onto Main Street and the finish line, you overhear the announcer on a microphone to the crowd of 500 saying "we are ASSURED the young lady IS coming in!" (Oh well, at least I was young).
- you recognize all the regular runners on your favorite route from behind.
- you get passed on the uphill by a runner pushing a double baby jog stroller.
- you shoot a 24-shot roll of film during a marathon.
- you make arrangements for a late checkout at the hotel.
- you are more worried about the porta-potty lines than the start line.
- your support crew talks about meeting you for supper, not lunch.
- you have to memorize the route because you know that you will lose the back of the pack.
- the truck picking up the cones is pressing on your behind. (Don't laugh-this actually happened to me!)
- as you pass a course volunteer they ask you, "How many are behind you yet?" and you say "Behind me? Behind? Gosh ... I think two ... Unless they turned around!"

the awards ceremony is over before you cross the finish line.

Getting Started

Getting off on the right foot means understanding enough about yourself, your life, and your willingness to commit to this new activity to begin to think about your life as a runner. It's about giving yourself permission to find the time to be a runner.

Time is often a big factor, particularly in the early days and weeks of our running lives. Many of us are already so busy that it's hard to imagine adding another time-consuming activity to our overstuffed schedules, although running is one of the most time efficient exercises around. You need to find a strategy that will allow you to make time for it.

If you are new to running or being active, one of the best ways to get started is to take an entire week to think about running. Each day that week, think about when and where you might have run that day. Think about how fast or how far you would run. Remind yourself that NEXT week, you really are going to run.

In the beginning, running doesn't need to take a lot of time. In the first few months, try to establish a schedule. You are more likely to succeed if you find just a few minutes several times a week that you can commit to running than if you devise an elaborate and completely undoable schedule that will fall apart in a matter of days.

Plan your runs on the basis of time rather than distance. Plan to get out of the house for a certain amount of time. Forget how far you go. Forget how fast you go. Just get out the door and stay out. For many people, twenty minutes of activity is a good place to begin. That does not mean running for twenty minutes. It means staying on your feet moving forward for twenty minutes. If you can run, run. If you can walk, walk. Do whatever you can, but keep moving forward. If it gets too hard, slow down.

A program of alternating running and walking is a good way to begin. The first week that may mean running for thirty seconds and walking for five minutes to recover. In time, it may mean running one minute and walking five, or running one and walking one. The truth is, it doesn't matter. What matters is that you are learning to use your body as a means of transportation.

Improvement is defined as being closer to where you want to be than you are right now. Remember, I couldn't run for more than a few steps in the beginning. Improvement for me was running farther than my driveway. You'll have to decide what improvement means for you. Is it to walk around your block without stopping? Then work toward that!

For better or worse, you are the only you that you will ever get. What you decide to do with you is up to you. Tomorrow you will still be you. The question is whether you will move closer today to who you want to be.

If you are patient, if you are persistent, if you are consistent, an amazing transformation will begin to occur. Your wonderfully adaptive body will begin to cooperate. It will happen in your own time and at your own pace, to be sure, but the transformation will take place.

Movement, which may have seemed so foreign to you, will become more natural. Being active every day will stop being something that you want to end and become something that you can't wait to start. It isn't just a matter of going farther or faster every day. It's knowing that you are in control of your body and, for a few minutes every day, your life.

You are becoming a runner. You are becoming a person for whom the activity of running is no longer completely foreign. Those brand-new running shoes will begin to show signs of wear. Those once bright white running socks will become dulled by the sweat of your transformation.

Not only are you becoming a runner, but you are becoming a runner in training. You will have goals. You will have good days and bad days. You will have days when you can't wait to run and days when you will have to force yourself out the door. In other words, you will be just like all the other runners. Every day you will be trying to do your best.

Becoming a Runner Why It's Worth The Effort

MOST OF THE CHANGES that a more active lifestyle brings are invisible. Sure, in time you may find that your clothes fit a little differently. If you are new to running, you may find that a distance that once seemed impossible now seems easy. If you are more experienced, you may find that your long runs and speed work are yielding tangible results.

But these changes are not the ones that are the most important. The changes that matter most are the ones going on inside, where you can't see them. I'm not talking about the subtle increases in the strength of your heart or lungs or legs. I'm talking about the very real changes in the strength of your resolve and your spirit.

Each day that you invest in yourself, you are becoming more of what you want to be. By giving yourself permission to dream of new PRs or completing a 5K, you are making sure that there is hope in your life. Instead of looking backwards to the good old days, you are assuring yourself that the best is yet to come.

At the heart of the matter, the real changes are in how you think about yourself. By discovering your limitations and then overcoming them, you can learn to be your own hero. And that, for most of us, is the biggest change of all.