



But I'd rather stay indoors!

Rhallou Allerhand pushes through the apathy barrier

On a good day, running makes me feel happy, healthy and invincible! But what about the off-days? We all have them, the ones when you just can't drag your butt out of the front door. It's a mystery to me how some women seem to glide across the park every day like swans, while I spend half my time feeling like an old wench wishing I hadn't gotten out of bed. Just what is their secret?

Admittedly, laziness, hormonal madness or too much wine usually play a part in my battle with motivation. But determined to find the key to running invincibility, I resolved to spend a month training specifically on my off-days, to see if I could unearth a few clues about achieving some consistency in my running ability.

Just do it

I started on a Monday afternoon in the middle of a snowstorm. Getting out of the door on Mondays is difficult enough without stepping into an ice kingdom, but after 10 minutes I soon warmed up.

The fresh air was invigorating, and the virgin snow delightfully crunchy underfoot. The trick to running on freezing cold days is to get out there and do it anyway. You'll soon warm up, and feel twice as great afterwards.

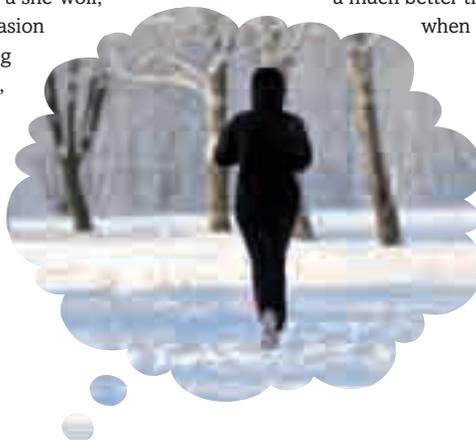
Next on my list was jogging with a hangover. I'm not talking running a 10K after an all-nighter on the tequilas (surely even superheroes would struggle), but having drunk a fair amount of wine the night before, I begrudgingly hit the park one Sunday morning – with surprising results. After a couple of laps in the bracing wind, I soon started to feel better, and, although it probably wasn't my best speed, it definitely eased the hangover and cleared my foggy head.

Monthly morphing

But the last test was the hardest. Like many women, for a few days every month I mysteriously morph into a she-wolf, and no amount of persuasion can make me do anything beyond lying on my sofa, eating chocolate and moaning. Somehow I managed to drag myself out of the door, but it wasn't easy. Despite

summoning every last drop of energy, I just couldn't make myself enjoy it and the experience put me off running again for several days.

So what have I gained from my explorations? I've learned to listen to my body. There are days when you know you're being lazy and you'll soon get into the swing of it, but there are other times when you're just not meant to run around a freezing park, and it's okay to stay indoors. I realised that if you're not enjoying it, there's not much point in doing it. So I now only run when I really want to, and it means I have a much better time when I do!



'There are days when you know you're being lazy'

MAKE A PLAN

If you struggle with the occasional off-day, you need a strategy to get back on track. Lesley Ackland who runs the Body Maintenance Studio in London (www.lesleyackland.com), has these tips:



> If you aren't feeling motivated, introduce speed-walking as a variation to your normal routine. Another good motivational tool is to include some light resistance exercise such as press-ups. This will make you feel like you've tried even harder than usual, which can turn around your thinking.

> If you're having an off-day, it's better to shorten your run or change your environment. People who run the same route every day almost go onto autopilot! If you just change one thing, it can challenge you mentally and lift your mood from an off-day to feeling more positive about running again.

> If you're physically tired, any form of strong exercise will make you feel worse. Think seriously about delaying your exercise until the next day, as running when physically tired increases injury risk.

> If you're mentally tired or stressed, however, exercise has been proven to have a beneficial effect. Exercise makes people feel less stressed and the endorphins released into the brain via exercise increase mental energy as well as the feeling of general wellbeing.