

'I'M A MOVING TARGET!'

INTREPID RUNNER AND ONLINE EDITOR RHALOU ALLERHAND EXPLAINS HOW TO COPE WHEN RUNNING IN A DODGY NEIGHBOURHOOD



As a lone woman runner living in East London, running can sometimes be a scary sport to entertain. My flat is nestled between a strip club and a halfway house, and even popping to the corner shop can be intimidating. But despite my dubious neighbours, my flat is only a stone's throw from yummy mummy-ville, where the streets are lined with shabby chic boutiques and delis flogging ludicrously expensive organic hummus. For some reason, the adjacent patch of bourgeoisie living justifies sky-high rent, but however pricey the organic butchers may be, it is just not a nice neighbourhood to be in after dark.

FEEL THE FEAR

No woman in her right mind would streak across my local park dressed in Lycra after dark, unless she was willing to get lynched. But the problem is, I run alone, I love running and I want to keep on running. So what's a girl to do when she's scared out of her wits, but determined to keep on trekking?

My friend Melissa has similar concerns. 'I run with a friend along the canals,' she says. 'We know we shouldn't be doing it, but still do and just speed up when we pass people. The time I do get scared is around gangs of teenage girls. They asked me for a cigarette the other day when I was running, and when I ignored them they started shouting after me – terrifying!'

My friend Kate also gets nervous. 'I'm a lone runner, too, and often speed up if I find myself on a deserted street and start to feel unsafe,' she says. 'I guess it's good interval training! But I do worry, as I'm a moving target.'

ACTION PLAN

There are a couple of obvious tips to ensure you stay safe, such as running without headphones and avoiding deserted streets. But do these really work? My friend Alice conversely uses headphones to her advantage. 'I found that running with headphones on stopped me getting into trouble, as I couldn't hear the hecklers!' she reveals. 'When I could hear them, I'd mouth back at those who had something to say and that led to getting spat on and threatened.'

So, what should we do if, God forbid, we are unlucky enough to get attacked while out running? Richard Chipping, from the London Centre for Personal Safety, suggests formulating a plan of action before setting out for your run. 'Develop a plan and practise what you would do if scenarios should occur,' he says. 'Research evidence has proven that if you use the environment around you and

quickly use force, make noise and call for help, the less risk you'll be in.'

Now I'm even more determined to brave the East London streets!

STAY SAFE

Top tips from the London Centre for Personal Safety (www.londoncentreforpersonalsafety.org.uk)

- Be positive and generate solutions to minimise the risks.
- Have a plan of action.
- Draw a map from memory of where you run, highlight where you feel you'd be at risk, then highlight where you'd get help. Where is it dark? Where is it risky? Where is help at hand?
- Use visualisation! Know your environment and use that knowledge.
- Run with a friend (you can find a running buddy in your area by visiting www.womensrunninguk.co.uk).
- If you're attacked, shout for help!
- Identify the people you're asking for help. For example: 'You in the green car, please call the police!'
- Make a lot of noise.
- Running is an effective safety measure and the best way to get away, so use your power positively.
- Above all else, enjoy your life and keep on running! ☺



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