

TRAIL RUNNING ADVENTURE

It's time to take that same old routine run around the neighborhood and turn it into a wildlife adventure. Wherever you live, there is a good likelihood that accessible trails are nearby. Trail running allows you to enjoy the beautiful scenery nature has to offer while simultaneously getting an excellent workout. The following information will help you transition your roadside or treadmill run to the great outdoors.

Types of Trails

- **Rails to trails**—All over the United States, unused railway lines have been converted into multiuse trails. These trails are flat and well-marked, which is perfect for somebody making the transition from road running. Surfaces are typically dirt, gravel or paved. Find a rail trail near you at www.railtrail.org.
- **Groomed trails**—Many local outdoor sites such as rivers, creeks and parks have packed-dirt paths. These smooth, soft surfaces are a great way to reduce impact without the added hazards of rocks and roots.
- **Hiking trails**—The most difficult of the three, hiking trails typically have obstacles such as rocks, roots and uneven surfaces that challenge your balance and running mechanics. These trails make for a great workout, but be cautious and start with a hike run. Run the flat sections; walk the hills and tricky terrain.

Finding Trails

One of the biggest reasons why people aren't utilizing these breathtaking trails is that they don't know where to find them. Don't let this simple problem interfere with your adventurous side. If you have Internet access, just search for trails in your area and you will be amazed by how many have been hiding from you. Always select trails that have been tested and recommended by others.

Health Advantages

Not only is running on a trail more entertaining than the road, it can also deliver a more intense workout. It typically provides a greater challenge to your balance centers and stabilization muscles as you work to climb the trails and control your descents. Furthermore, running on a straight road does little for your senses, while trail running tends to keep you focused on the obstacles, keeping your body and mind guessing.



Equipment Needs

The correct equipment will be the difference between a good experience and a potentially unsafe experience. Given the type of terrain you are running on, a good pair of trail running shoes is paramount. They offer better lateral and heel support than standard running shoes and usually have a heavier tread pattern for traction on the trails.

Trail running may involve water, possibly soaking your socks and shoes. Traditional cotton socks increase the likelihood for blistering. Select socks made from synthetic fibers or the newer breathable socks that help keep your feet cool and help prevent blisters.

When running trails at altitude, sudden temperature changes are possible, so layer your clothing. Wear clothing that allows your body to cool, yet wicks away moisture from sweat. Wet clothing against your skin may shuttle necessary heat out of your body, especially at higher, cooler altitudes.

Taking a pole or stick with you is always a good idea. Not only can it help stabilize your body over tricky terrain, but it can also come in handy when fending off any unexpected wildlife.

Safety and Running Tips

- Hike a trail for the first time to become familiar with it, then progress to a run. Never run alone, especially when running on trails far off the beaten path
- Carry various forms of communication devices with you. Examples include a whistle, satellite-GPS device or cell phone in case reception is available.
- Carry some basic first-aid supplies. Examples include bandages, some athletic tape, a knife and anti-bacterial ointment.
- Distribute the weight of items evenly around your body. Try to carry most of the weight at the hips.
- Bend your knees during descents to prevent possible knee injuries from hyperextension. Also avoid leaning back excessively on descents to prevent your feet from slipping out from under you on loose surfaces.
- Keep your head up to enhance forward momentum and drive with your arms from the shoulders, not the elbows.
- Use shorter strides on steeper terrain for energy efficiency and increased power.

Additional Resources

American Trail Running Association:
www.trailrunner.com

Active.com: www.active.com/story.cfm?STORY_ID=12362&CHECKSSO=0&CATEGORY=active_women

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at www.acefitness.org and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts™



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