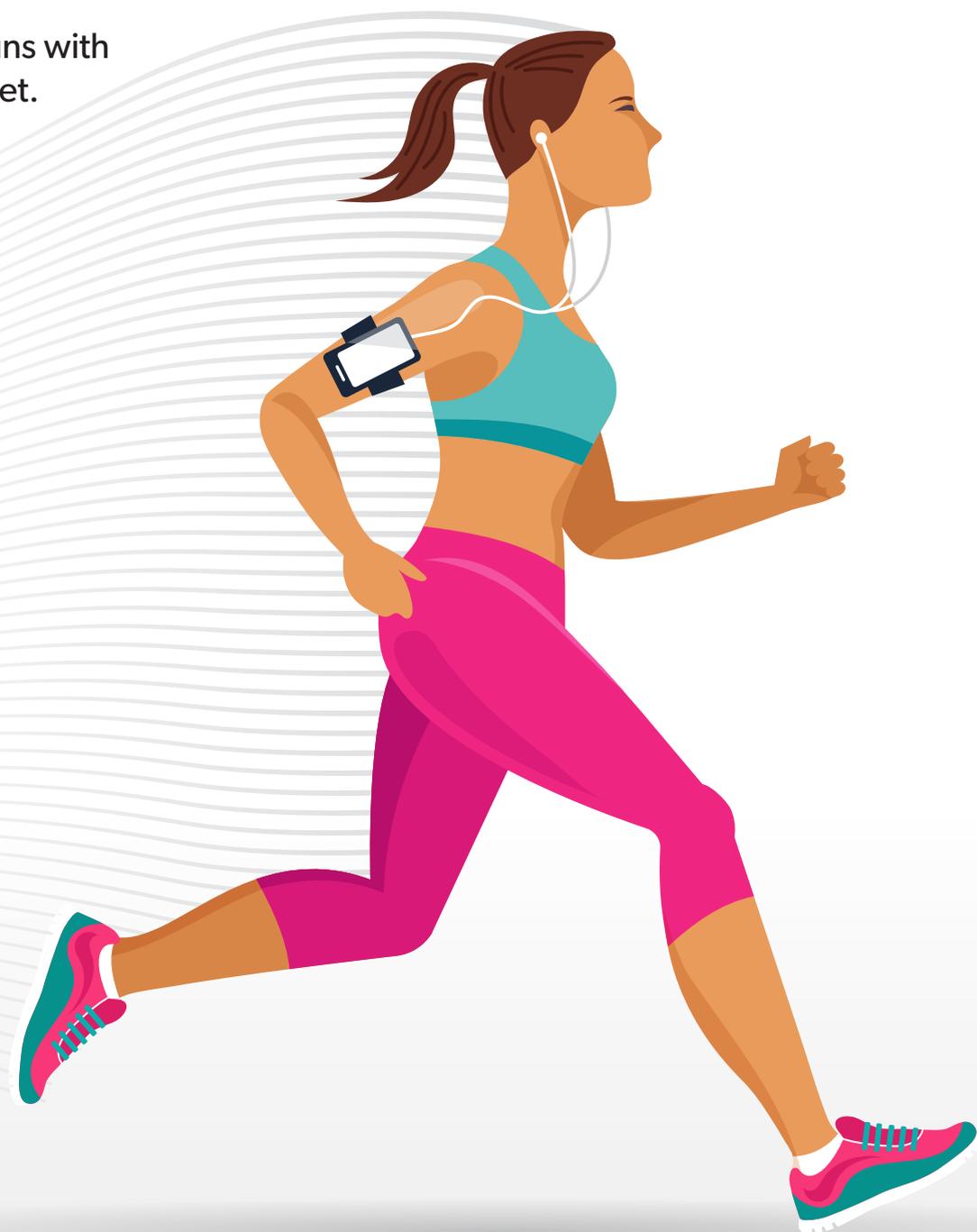


RUN, THINK, BE

Tackle tough runs with
the right mindset.

BY DEBBIE KING



I'm used to a kaleidoscope of thoughts flashing through my mind on run days: grocery lists, unanswered emails, child care arrangements—but this was different. One autumn afternoon, I sat motionless on my living room sofa. I felt ill. My head throbbed and my chest ached. Two hours later, I had one of my best sprint training sessions ever.

I'm a passionate athlete learning to master the power of mindset. That rocky afternoon, I was prepared, maintained focus, and performed without distraction—which I credit to a positive mental attitude and mindfulness.

Experts such as sport psychologist, Dr. Stephen Walker and marathon record-holder, Paula Radcliffe, have spoken to the many ways mindset and mindfulness can influence enjoyment and success on the road, trail, or track.

So how can you tackle those tough run days, when unexpected situations are thrown your way? Try these proven strategies before and during your run.

CHANGE YOUR MINDSET

Mindset matters long before we zip up our shells or lace up our Asics. For me, gratitude and growth mindset are an integral starting point.

Attitude of gratitude

Running isn't a punishment inflicted on us, it's something we choose to do. As part of a positive mindset, I acknowledge and give thanks for a body capable of running, and for an environment and resources that enable me to do so safely. That's surely not the case for several others.

Try it: Start your run by stating aloud, "I'm so thankful I'm able to do this."

Establishing a growth mindset

A growth mindset implies that we are evolving and willing to address those things that challenge us and take them in stride. According to Walker, "The evidence is clear and there is a tremendous amount of scientific research that illustrates how people who engage in a growth mindset become more capable, more flexible and more resilient." Had I bailed on my scheduled practice that jolting afternoon, I would have missed out on learning that I'm capable of great focus and performance under stress.

'Being mindful is about being present, noticing thoughts and accepting feelings without judgement.'

Try it: When facing a challenging run, ask yourself, "How can I learn or gain from this?"

GET A HEAD START

Goal-setting

Aside from long-term goals like race personal best, we can set behavioural or outcome goals that assign purpose to each and every run. On the day of that awesome sprint session, I woke up envisioning myself feeling strong on the track and had decided to concentrate on challenging my effort. Having a pre-set goal helped me stay on track without the workout getting derailed by distraction.

Try it: Determine a focus for your next run. It could be a pace, fine-tuning technique, practicing a mantra, or even just to complete a certain distance.

KEEP YOUR HEAD IN THE GAME

While positive mindset and preparation set us up well, mindfulness can get us through demanding speed, tempo, and long runs. Being mindful is about being present, noticing thoughts and accepting feelings without judgement.

Tune in

Radcliffe suggests that when the going gets tough, instead of distracting ourselves with thoughts that take our minds astray, we stay in the moment, be aware of how our body is doing, conserve energy, and maintain efficiency. "It's important not to panic and to keep focussed," says Radcliffe. "Use little techniques to make yourself think about the moment, whether it's singing to yourself, counting landmarks or counting in your head—anything."

Try it: When negative thoughts kick in during a race or workout, focus on your breathing, foot strike, split times, or another element of your run.

Mantras

Reciting short, positive action words helps direct the mind from negative thoughts to positive ones. A good mantra captures what you want to feel, and may be part of your regular routine, or a tool you draw on when needed.

Try it: Create a personal mantra using action verbs and strong adjectives like, go, run, fly, and strong, brave, bold.

Whether you're a busy student, parent, professional, an experienced runner or novice, you're bound to face anticipated challenges and unexpected situations that impact your runs. Developing a mental attitude that governs your response to situations, and employing mindfulness tools can help you keep you on track—even on your toughest days. 

Debbie King is a multi-sport athlete who is on a mission to medal at the 2020 World Masters Athletics Championships. Under the tagline "Supafitmama," she produces content that connects active women with resources across sport, fitness, and wellness.



www.supafitmama.com



@supafitmama