

SAFETY FOR WOMEN RUNNERS

Overcoming the dangers of running: cars, canines, pollution, muggers, & MORE

Mary Rudolph, a 26-year-old San Franciscan, was taking a one-mile jog through Yellowstone National Park. As she crested a small hill she was attacked by a bear. In a rush, the bear threw her to the ground; as she fell she had the presence of mind to curl up and play dead. After a brief mauling, the bear wandered off.

Staggering to a road, Rudolph waved down a passing motorist and was given a ride to a nearby hospital. She was consequently transferred to Salt Lake City's University Hospital, where four surgeons worked on her for 5½ hours to repair damage to her face, arms, and body. The surgery was successful because of her good fortune in being able to flag down help along the road quickly enough.

Things did not turn out so well for a young woman on Hawaii's island of Oahu. The woman was out jogging along a road where she was hit by a car. Dazed by the impact, she was forced into the car by the driver; she was sodomized and raped.

When the case went to court, Wilbur Moyd, a 21-year-old Marine based on the island, was charged with sodomy, but the rape charge was dismissed by district judge Robert Richardson on the grounds of insufficient proof of force. The incident drew quick response from the women of Hawaii. Janice Arnold-Jones, chairperson of the Women Against Rape group, spoke before a rally of 700 men and women across from the courthouse, saying: "Judge Richardson has made a very dangerous decision. He's declared open season on all women joggers and he puts women in the position of having to fight, even if fighting could mean death or serious bodily injury."

These two incidents point out several things to joggers and runners:

- 1) Safety should be a full-time consideration of a woman who jogs or runs, and one's safety should never be taken for granted; threats to the safety of a jogger or runner come from two directions: nature and "civilization."

- 2) Before considering many of the elements that go into running safely, and before examining more closely the sources of threats to a runner, it should be pointed out that, as with material covered in other chapters of this book, what applies to women also applies, in most cases, to men.

- 3) Also, many of the topics covered in this chapter will be at least touched upon in other chapters of this book, because matters of safety for runners cannot be overstated.

PUTTING THINGS IN PROPORTION

Now that you are frightened out of your wits about even venturing out the door, much less running several miles from your home, let me assure you that the dangers are not lurking around every tree—unless you are running in New York’s Central Park at midnight on a dark night. Most of the injuries you will suffer as a runner will come from running itself, and not from the world you run through. The aches and pains of overstressing some part of the body by running beyond your current conditioning level will likely be the only injury most runners will suffer from running.

Pain and suffering from outside influences working adversely upon a runner are not especially common—primarily because most runners, by applying common sense and by running conservatively, manage to avoid situations that would otherwise endanger them.

Women, in that regard, are at a disadvantage, however. Until recently, young girls were discouraged from exploring the world around them from the same perspective as boys did. Girls were encouraged to play house or stay in the yard; they were discouraged from engaging in sports or activities that might in some way expose them to skinned knees, getting dirty, or meeting the pratfalls of life. Boys, on the other hand, were pretty much allowed their due; and in most cases, they took it to the limit, gathering intimate knowledge of every swimming hole, construction site, drainage pipe system, and fenced lot within miles. They all came home with nicks, scratches, bloodied heads; they sampled the dangers of the landscape first-hand and survived.

When they take up running, women are venturing into a land beyond the streets on which their doll houses were constructed. Even tomboys are expected to turn into socially-acceptable girls somewhere along the way to maturity, and their ability to deal with the hostile little beasts of the world is short-circuited.

In a sense, though, the caution instilled in young girls may come in handy as they take up running because caution is the first rule of running through the world safely. (The male’s cockiness in knowing the world and its traps might well be what leads him into trouble on a run.) Let’s explore the wonderful world of Nature first, where we can meet bears and snakes and poison oak and getting lost and heat and cold and slippery leaves and probably the greatest danger to a runner: over-enthusiasm.

THE PITFALLS OF NATURE

Most women runners, fortunately, will never see a bear outside a zoo. The mauling that Nancy Rudolph suffered is fairly uncommon because such a small percentage of runners doing their roadwork in National Parks and because there are so few bears to go around. The lure of running in a beautiful natural setting, especially for someone who has been doing most of her training in an urban situation, is certainly strong.

When running in or near the woods, it is best to forget every Disney movie you've ever seen. Two rabbits sitting in a field are not conversing on your running style, and they are not demurely giggling about the passing of the world before their burrow.

Be cautious around wild animals. Avoid them if at all possible.

A cute, seemingly harmless male deer, looking so majestic and graceful with its antlers crowning its noble head, can easily attack a human if it is spooked or approached at the wrong time of the year. The antlers that are so attractive are put there for a purpose. Allow the deer to go on grazing and give it a wide berth; you really would be better off not finding out for what purpose Nature gave the deer antlers.

Returning to bears: They may look cute begging for food from car windows in the National Parks, and we all know what teddy bears are for. No matter how cute they may look, however, an adult bear could easily roll a car over to get at something underneath that interests it. Its jaws are capable of cutting down young saplings. Bears are some of the moodiest creatures on earth, capable of quickly developing the disposition of an enraged mother-in-law. They are also very curious creatures, and seemingly almost always hungry. Some hikers and campers report that they've seen very positive evidence that bears are attracted by various types of perfumes and that they are almost always attracted by women who are in their menses cycle.

The best advice is to avoid running where the bear population is known to hang out looking for handouts. What they see as a handout may well be something you were planning on keeping.

It gets a little difficult following this advice, but while running in wooded areas, especially in the middle of summer, look up while you are running so you can be pre-warned of animals like deer and bears but try to look down, also. Most snakes you are likely to encounter are harmless; all snakes will be as frightened of you as you are of them. Snakes are naturally timid creatures. They don't go out looking for runners or hikers to bite. Snakes bite things they want to eat. What would they do with a 112-pound woman after they bit her? They don't chew their food, they sort of wrap their very mobile jaws around it and work it into their belly. They take a measure of the meal in advance by nosing around it to see if it's too big to eat and only a very gluttonous snake tries to swallow more than it's capable of handling.

I've had several pet boas, and while I can state that snakes (even of the same species) have very individual personalities, I wouldn't advise a woman runner to stop when she sees one to ask it about its eating habits or religious beliefs. Luckily for most women, their playing in the yard with dolls ill-prepared them to be comfortable around snakes, and the reaction of most women when confronted by a snake is to turn from a jogger into a sprinter. If you spot the snake early enough, flight is the safest course. If you spot a snake when you are nearly upon it, running is the worst possible thing to do; the safe course is to freeze. Snakes have very bad eyesight, and they sense their prey or the clumsy person who's pushed them into an offensive stance by smell and by the

vibrations from the quarry's feet being passed through the ground to the snake's sensitive underbelly.

Confronted by a rattlesnake as a nine-year-old while picking huckleberries in Pennsylvania, I'd had enough coaching from my father in advance so that I simply froze and called to him. The snake was quickly dispatched, but for the period of time it took for my father to arrive with a big rock, I had ample opportunity to study the snake. As soon as I froze, the snake's senses went into overdrive trying to pick up some indication of where I'd gotten to; its head turned slowly from side to side while it occasionally rattled its tail; as my father approached, the vibrations of his footsteps drew the snake's attention away from me. I'm sure that had I been alone (which is not a good way to go traipsing or running through the woods), the snake would have eventually calmed down and slithered off; it was ready to strike because I'd come upon it while it was sunning, and I was an unexpected intrusion and it did not have enough advanced warning to retreat.

Snakes know they're at a disadvantage in size when compared to human beings (unless they are full-grown pythons or boas or anacondas in the jungle), and they don't want any hassles. The primary poisonous snakes in the United States are copperheads, coral snakes, water moccasins, and rattlesnakes; it is possible to find rattlesnakes in most parts of the country, while the rest are very regionalized. Instead of learning all the poisonous and non-poisonous snakes in the country, and then forgetting which are which, it is safest to avoid all snakes. This can be done by glancing at the ground in front of you when you run, by avoiding rocky areas, by checking with a ranger or campers, and by avoiding running after dark; snakes like to lie on asphalt roadways and rocks after dark, soaking up the heat that the sun has beat into the road and rocks all day long.

Snakes, although not strictly social animals, are often found in the company of other snakes, so when (and if) you see one, don't jump blindly into another snake to escape the first one. Again, the best advice is to run with a companion. If bitten by a poisonous snake, do not run hysterically away from it; such activity only speeds the poison through the body. Move away from it calmly and sit down; send your companion for help; or wait for the people from your campsite to come for you since you undoubtedly were smart enough to tell them in advance where you were going to be running and they'll be coming to look for you.

ATTACKS FROM THE AIR

Recently, on one of the courses I run frequently in Palo Alto, California, I have been "attacked" by a blackbird. The bird lives in a tree somewhere off Alma Street and although I've never done anything to it, whenever I come plodding through its territory it takes to the air like a jet interceptor and begins making dives at me, all the while making war-like sounds. It never comes quite close enough to strike me, but it does harass me until I pass through its territory. Although children and adults of all shapes and sizes walk and ride bikes and run through the same territory, they are not attacked. I have come to the conclusion that it may be the orange shirt I wear when I run. I'm planning

on trying that course with different colored shirts to experiment with the belligerent little bird to see just what his gripe is.

I thought that perhaps my situation was unique until I read the report of a hawk back in my native Pennsylvania that is not just harassing runners, but actually attacking them. It clobbered five different runners from behind in a one-month period, hitting them hard enough to knock them to the ground. The hawk resides in Tyler State Park and although hawk experts say that this type of hawk behavior is unlikely, runners like Sam Petryszak and Steven Harnish have cuts on the back of their heads to prove otherwise. Hawk experts insist that the bird is a horned owl that is trying to protect its young; the numerous attacked runners insist that they know a hawk from an owl. To date, the hawk has not been found in the 1700-acre park. Park officials are warning runners and joggers of the danger.

FLORA FIGHTS BACK

In addition to attacks from the air, a runner must be cautious of attacks from the ground by plants.

There are three plants that every runner who ventures near the woods, whether Central Park or Yellowstone Park, should know intimately: poison sumac, poison ivy, and poison oak.

Even if it involves sending for government pamphlets or buying books on plants, familiarize yourself with the itching three. Some runners are capable of getting poison oak just by thinking about it; other are capable of contracting all three; some runners seem to be immune to anything. Some people seem to have changes in their reaction to the poison leaves as they age. As a child I could roll in poison ivy all day and it had absolutely no effect on me. While running cross-country workouts in college, I wandered past a stand of poison ivy and was miserable for a week, finally needing shots to get rid of it.

Get to know the leaves and the areas in which each variety grows.

Poison ivy is a North American plant; poison oak is a variety of poison ivy that has leaves that look like oak leaves. Paradoxically, neither plant is of the ivy nor oak family. They belong to the same family with poison sumac, which causes fewer problems than the other two culprits.

An oily substance on the plants that adheres to the skin causes severe inflammation. The little buggers are especially virile during the spring and summer, and the oily substance can be passed from one person to the other by contact, and it can also be passed by coming in contact with clothes that have brushed against the plant. The clothes and bed linen should be washed in very hot water with a double dose of detergent to decompose the oily substance.

If you've brushed against poison oak (which is common in the southeast and the Pacific Coast) or poison ivy, you have roughly two hours to get home, find a bar of laundry soap, take a shower, and wash it off; don't take a bath, as the oily stuff just floats on the surface of the water and will get right back on you as you stand up.

Poison oak especially can ruin your running, because once infected, besides the discomfort of itching and rash, it gets into the blood stream and can cause listlessness. In extreme cases, it can cause blood poisoning. Don't expect it to go away without a good nudge. The best way to deal with the poison plants, however, is to get to know them and then avoid them entirely.

I should digress for a moment and tell you a story about poison oak and another possible threat on your nature jaunts.

GETTING LOST IN THE WOODS

Amby Burfoot (winner of the 1968 Boston Marathon) and I wanted to go on a run with some hillwork thrown in one Monday afternoon after work. I'd gone on a run the previous Saturday with a group of runners through a wilderness area behind Hidden Villa Ranch in Los Altos Hills. We'd skirted some poison oak plants, but we were being led by a runner who knew the area very well, and who kept us away from the real concentration areas of poison oak. It was a very good run along a narrow wooded path, with a stream running next to us, with a steep hill at the end of the valley that ended on an open grassy ridge with a great view of the area. Amby and I both enjoy cross-country so we felt it would be a great run.

We ran two miles to Hidden Villa Ranch, down the dirt road to the buildings, past the picnic area, and across a log onto a path next to a gentle tumbling stream. I kept looking for the second log we had crossed on Saturday, but it never came. I consoled myself by the fact that the valley in which we were running was exactly the same as the valley we'd run in Saturday. Unfortunately, it wasn't.

We clambered over fallen logs, crossed and recrossed the stream as the path wound this way and that. We kept climbing, occasionally walking a rough spot. The trail pretty much disappeared. We occasionally encountered a game trail, which we followed until it, too, petered out. "We're bound to intersect with the ridge up ahead if we keep going," I said foolishly. I was working under the assumption that we had taken a turn to the left of the valley I'd been up Saturday. In reality, we'd gone off to the right of it, and there was going to be no ridge path at the top of the mountain.

We struggled onward, going higher and higher. We were perspiring and the sweat on our shirts began to take on a chill as the sun fell lower in the sky. The huge trees and the stream kept the valley damp and chilly. We began to realize that at least half the reason we kept moving was to keep warm. After spending a half-hour crawling over, under, around, and through twisted trees and brambles where a rabbit would have trouble moving, we made the top of the mountain—and looked out at other equally impressive mountains. The end of the San Francisco Bay and San Jose were visible

about 15 miles away. Before us, in that direction, lay brambles and shrubbery that a fly would have had trouble negotiating. The air was turning cold, as it has a way of doing in Northern California when the sun dips to the horizon. Behind us, in the valley, it was already getting dark. We heard a low-flying plane and joked that it was the search party looking for our remains.

Fortunately, the valley up which we'd come was a good guide to getting back to Hidden Villa Ranch. Unfortunately, when you've traveled so far in dense underbrush, it don't look the same goin' back as it did comin'. We had the valley to guide us back. We also had the sun; by keeping it to our left (it was on the right as we came out on our run), we could obviously return to the spot we'd left. "We should have left bread crumbs to follow back," Amby said, still trying to keep up our spirits as the sweat on our shirts began to feel icy.

We found that, at least on the top of the mountain, we could not get back to the valley the way we'd come because the brambles were too dense and we couldn't find the exact meandering path we'd made. We were forced through one patch after another of exotic-smelling wild herbs and bushes. Eventually, we faced a little patch of poison oak about the size of a child's swimming pool. It lay in a little clearing as though someone had cultivated it there. There was no other way into the valley without a quarter-mile detour. The sun was gone below the horizon. So we charged through the stuff. It took two weeks, a bottle of calamine lotion, a visit to the doctor, and a bottle of pills to shake the stuff, despite the fact that we both washed as much as we could when we returned to civilization.

We opted for the poison oak, though, rather than being stuck on a mountaintop any longer than we had to with the light failing. Neither of us relished the thought of spending the night curled up next to a fallen log while our sweaty shirts turned to ice chests.

It is common sense for runners, whether they be male or female, to run in pairs in unfamiliar territory. It is also good advice to opt for repeating a short loop near your campsite or cabin or motor-home than for a long loop that will take you far afield from your home base. The woods can be a great place to run in, a great place to camp and hike in, but a frightening place in which to be lost. Take precautions. Let people back at camp know where you are going and how long you expect to be gone.

Common sense also dictates that you take several pair of shoes along on trips to the woods. Take a pair with herringbone soles or something similar for running roads through the woods that might be damp or that might have wet leaves; the herringbone pattern gives you much more surface area on the ground and makes it more difficult to slip or slide; waffle soles are terrible for running on wet leaves, consistently damp asphalt roads through wooded areas, and roads that have quite a bit of tar patching on them (the tar gets extremely slippery when wet). Waffle-soled shoes can be used on dirt trails and in grassy fields and on dry roads.

EXTREMES OF TEMPERATURE

In most parts of the country, there is a large range of temperatures and weather conditions; nature can make the landscape 40 degrees below zero at one time of the year and 101 six months later. Living near San Francisco, we get spoiled, because it is conducive to running 365 days out of the year. There is a cooling trend from the ocean during the summer, and winters are extremely mild; it rains when it's scheduled to rain and the sun shines most of the summer. Few other places in America are that ideal.

Having been born and raised in Pennsylvania, I know the sub-zero winters near the Pocono Mountains; having also spent five years outside Washington, D.C., I also know the 95-degree, 95-percent-humidity, the-air-ain't-moved-for-two-weeks summers.

Each radical change in temperature produces its own problems.

The greatest threat in winter is not freezing to death (unless you run blithely into a blizzard and get lost), but falling down on the snow and ice and getting broken bones. Running in the winter, your last concern should be fashion. Wear several layers of loose-fitting clothes. This provides several advantages. The various layers trap body warmth (and running does produce a great deal of body warmth) and keep the runner snug and warm; by wearing several relatively light layers instead of one big, bulky layer, as your body temperature builds and you begin to get warm, you can easily remove one layer and tie it around your waist, thereby bringing your body temperature down to a more comfortable level. It is very easy to become overheated while running in sub-zero temperatures. Removable layers of clothing provide you with your own thermostat.

There are parts of your body that should be protected during winter running because they will not be snugly inside layers of clothing. You can cover your face with a ski mask; even though you'll look as though you are running away from a bank holdup, it will protect your ears, nose, cheeks, and throat from cold air and from possible frostbite. Mittens or socks over the hands are good because you can keep your hands warmed if your fingers are in contact with each other rather than in their own little sheaths as they are in gloves. Socks are a necessity; wool socks are best because even if they get wet in the cold, the little body heat that your feet is producing will warm the dampness and will cause it to work like insulation.

It is also good to get in the habit of wearing something bright as your outer layer of clothing (except in the extreme heat, where white is best, since it reflects rather than absorbs the sun's heat) because it makes you much more visible to snowplow drivers and to hunters. Brightly-colored clothing also makes it easier for motorists to see you, which will be dealt with more thoroughly later in this chapter.

The main caution when running in the winter is to consider the fact that with a great deal of clothing on, your movements are going to be somewhat constructed, so don't try to run quite as far as you would if you were going for a run wearing only a T-shirt and shorts. Don't do an out-and-back run equal to what you do in the spring; the road back may become incredibly hard to travel, and once you stop running and begin walking, the

cold will really begin setting in on all those little damp pockets of your clothing. Run close to your house in the winter. A nice, warm place to return to makes the run feel good; a nice, warm place to return to that is still three miles off when you've run out of gas can be a very bad way to see the new snowfall.

HOT STUFF

On the opposite side of the calendar is the extreme heat of summer. In some areas, the extreme heat combines with the equally extreme humidity. There are obvious cautions involved in running in hot weather.

The first caution involves liquids. When running in hot weather, drink some water before going on the run. While on the run, if your mouth begins to feel like cotton (dry and puffy) either find some liquid within the next quarter-mile or walk until your mouth comes back to the point where your tongue works as it's supposed to work. Don't try to tough it through a run in heat without liquids. Your body is sending you a message that it needs water or some other liquid, even if your brain doesn't have the sense to understand that running in extreme heat uses up body fluids at an incredible rate.

The second caution involves clothing. Women feel slighted running in hot weather because society demands that they wear a T-shirt or singlet or halter-top or some other form of clothing over their chest. Male runners, on the other hand, often remove their shirts and run bare-chested. There are actually several ways of looking at the matter of clothing in hot weather. Running bare-chested may be more comfortable. Running while wearing a shirt may also be just as comfortable. A light-colored shirt (white, yellow, bright orange) will reflect the sun, while bare skin and dark-colored clothes absorb the sun's heat. A shirt absorbs perspiration from the body as the body machinery attempts to regulate its temperature; the perspiration soaking the shirt cools as it leaves the body, creating a sort of cool insulation around the chest of the runner. (This sensation is very readily noticeable when running from sunlight into the shade; the coolness in the shade emphasizes the coolness of the shirt's perspiration, sometimes even causing a slight chill.) So, wearing a shirt of some kind is not necessarily a disadvantage for women; it may be just the opposite. Consider, too, that the damp shirt allows the body to lose perspiration at a much slower rate than does a chest exposed to the hot sun, when the perspiration often evaporates as soon as it emerges from the skin, and the body must immediately replace it. This evaporation effect is further speeded up if there is a slight breeze.

The third caution involves overtraining. Heat puts great strain on even a resting body. Body functions are going at full tilt to keep the very critical temperature at a reasonable level. Exercise puts further strain on the body, especially on the heart. Reports of people dying of heart attacks while running have scared many people. Running is reputedly supposed to help build up the heart, and here people are dying. What gives?

What gives is often that inexperienced joggers or runners are overtaxing themselves, especially on unseasonably hot days in the spring with the urge to get out and run the roads. The older a new runner is the more gradually he or she should ease into running; the more adverse the conditions (and an unseasonably warm day is an adverse condition), the more cautious a runner should be.

Many deaths are due to overdoing it without a proper training base built up beforehand. Some are due to overtaxing the body on a particularly hot day. Others occur because the person was scheduled, by the Great Schedule, for termination and they happen to be out jogging at the time; they could just as easily have been sleeping or eating supper or watching television; people die all the time and with the incredible number of people in America jogging and running, some deaths are going to occur while the person is engaged in that activity.

There is a great body of evidence that regular running, done intelligently, can contribute to strengthening the heart; there is some evidence that a person running at the marathon level becomes almost immune to heart problems. Arthur Lydiard of New Zealand, one of the world's great running coaches, has had a program for a decade of turning heart-attack patients into marathon runners within one or two years after their heart attacks.

There is the mad-dogs-and-Englishmen syndrome in many runners, however. The syndrome is usually apparent in middle-aged business executives who take up running. They are impatient, highly competitive, and demanding of themselves; they rush on where angels would take a rest, and they end up dying from the very thing that could have helped them. They run like madmen no matter what the temperature or conditions. (There are some female runners who are equally obsessed, especially younger runners. Which is one reason younger people seldom make good marathon runners; they do not have the patience to pace themselves properly.)

I've seen middle-aged men, who've switched from tennis to running, and who are, in fact, running in their very expensive and exclusive tennis clothes, with a spare tire still in evidence around their middles, huffing and puffing and turning blue on the hottest day of the year. It's painful just to watch them abusing themselves.

In the heat, the air is much thinner than when it is cold, and therefore more air is needed to satisfy the body's needs; consequently, the runners is going to be breathing harder, faster. There is obviously going to be more strain. When running in the heat becomes a strain, it's time to head home for the day. If the compulsion to run is extremely great, put running off until the evening, when it may be cooler, or when the sun is down so that it is not sapping you of body fluids.

After running in the heat, give in to your body's needs for fluids. Drink as much as they body wants; you won't be able to overdrink. You'll find that even when you fill yourself with liquids during the first hour after running, you'll still be thirsty three hours later. The body will be replacing the liquids it expended for many hours; give it what it needs;

you've got mechanisms in your body that will stop you before you drown yourself and that will excrete any excess you might be able to ingest.

If you are a woman who has progressed to the racing stage, and if you arrive at a race and the heat is stifling, just turn around, walk back to your car, and go home. Races run in extremely hot weather conditions are not good for the body. They put too much strain on it and they rob it of too much, both physically and psychologically. After a particularly hot race, it is possible to feel "down" for weeks because of what the body has suffered. Running is supposed to be fun, and although racing is expected to be a little bit of a strain and somewhat painful in parts, it should not be cruel and unusual punishment to your body. It calls for a philosophy not too unlike the one used by wise generals in times of war: When the opposition builds to an overwhelming amount, retreat so that you can fight again on another day; to be taken down for the sake of pride and glory is a waste.

PUTTING NATURE IN PERSPECTIVE

I've taken great pains to make the dangers of Nature sound worse than they really are because I'd rather a women runner were overcautious than flippant. Some of the dangers are minor (poison ivy) while other are rare but can be fatal (bear attacks). But they are all out there, waiting somewhere, waiting for someone who forgets that the best way to approach running in Nature is by keeping common sense running five steps in front of your feet.

Some of the most beautiful and fulfilling running you'll ever do will be away from civilization. Running among redwoods is an inspirational experience. Skirting a lively brook on a run through the woods gives running a whole new meaning. Running slowly, comfortably through any aesthetically pleasing patch of nature allows you to see the scenery with new eyes because running identifies you with the animals that inhabit the place. This sounds relatively hokey, perhaps, but it is true. There's a certain freedom for the runner when he or she runs through the woods. Maybe it's a part of the primitive "collective" memory that stays locked in the genes, or maybe it's a psychological high, the mind thanking the body for getting it away from the hassles of civilization for even an hour. But there is something very special about running in the wilderness. With the proper cautions it can be an exceptionally uplifting experience and one that almost every woman runner will want to repeat often.

THE WILDERNESS OF CIVILIZATION

Running with the bear and the snake is preferable to running with the mugger and the rapist. For many women interested in running, however, there are no real choices. If you want to run, you must face—and overcome—the rigors of civilization. Or else you must move to a rural or woodland environment, which is not especially easy, because the people who are running most are the people who depend on the institutions of "civilization" for their livelihood. For highly civilized Americans, the run is, in a way, a return to primitive pleasures while they still function in the modern world.

There are obvious dangers lurking around corners for the female runner in a civilized environment, whether it be urban or suburban. Or, for that matter, even rural.

There are dangers from other people (in the form of muggers, rapists, perverts of all sizes and descriptions and tastes), from pollution (both man-made and canine-made), from cars and trucks and buses, from children and bicyclists and pedestrians and other runners, from cracks in the pavement and even from house-broken dogs.

Without belaboring the point, I much prefer to face the dangers of the wilderness when I run than face the dangers of civilization. Like most Americans, however, the choice is not mine. My daily runs are through heavily-populated suburban/urban areas. As with running in the wilderness, common sense is the runner's best companion. Common sense and the First Commandment of Running Amidst Civilization, which each runner—male or female—should have branded on the inside of the brain or tattooed on the inside of the eyelids: Treat everything in civilization as though it is out to kill you. If you don't, it just might.

(Again, an admonition: The following litany of dangers and the way to avoid them is not made to discourage women from running in an urban or suburban environment. These dangers are not lurking around every corner every time you run; but having all the odds on your side is the best way to enjoy running for the rest of your life.)

RUNNING IN THE STREETS

Rape and muggings are not new to civilization. Most societies have had them since the advent of man-made structures behind which a rapist or mugger could hide.

- Never run alone after dark. Never run in remote areas (such as Central Park in New York City or Golden Gate Park in San Francisco), as there are just too many places a rapist could hide and there are too many convenient places a rapist could drag you once he jumps out of hiding. Know the neighborhood in which you are running and don't wander into unfamiliar areas by yourself; especially in urban areas, the texture of a neighborhood can change in a matter of two blocks.
- Do not run blithely, not paying attention to what is going on around you; it is often possible to spot a potentially dangerous situation long before it materializes if you're paying attention.
- Carry the price of a phone call in a little pocket sewn inside your running shorts in case you find yourself in a neighborhood you didn't intend to enter; then call a friend or the police to come get you. Don't ever assume that because you're a liberated woman you can handle any situation that comes up; the rapist might not know that you are going to be able to handle everything and go ahead with his plans anyway.
- Try not to run the same route every day; don't help a rapist know where and when he can expect you. Despite the benefit many of us get from running alone, forego running alone to running with a group if it is in a time or place where you feel you may need the protection that friends can offer.

There have been more and more reports coming in of female runners who have managed to outrun would-be attackers (rapists, muggers, and perverts are not always in the best of shape); don't rely on that as a possibility, however. The male is still faster in sprint events, and you're not likely to get the opportunity to make the chase a marathon, so don't count on your running ability to get you away from potentially bad situations. Avoid the situation in the first place.

It is not a bad idea to organize the female runners and joggers in your area into groups, for mutual protection and for mutual training benefits. If you can get such a group formed, contact the local police department and have them send a representative to talk to your group about the best ways of avoiding dangerous situations. Approached properly, the local police will be more than happy to help female runners enjoy their avocation in safety.

Also, if you are going running, always tell someone where you are planning to run and what time you expect to be back, even though this takes away the free spirit aspect of the run. The little time and trouble involved in doing so can save you a lot of grief later on. If you are single, make arrangements to tell your landlord or even the janitor or some person in your building where you're likely to be and what time you expect to be back.

The runner, because of the amount of territory he or she covers, is a second string of police officers. Runners have come across traffic accidents, mugging victims, robberies in progress, any number of things, because they happen to be at the right place at the right time. The runner should be prepared to run to the nearest phone to report accidents, strange doings, the presence of perverts, whatever.

Runners have frequently been able to contact fire departments in time to save office buildings and family dwellings, when they've run past and noticed smoke coming from places other than chimneys. Be alert when you run, for your own safety and the safety of others.

POLLUTION GETS IN YOUR EYES

And on our feet. Running in New York City is becoming more a training ground for hurdles than for distance runners. If you can negotiate the stool from New York City dogs, you too can easily qualify for the low hurdles or the steeplechase. Even walking is becoming difficult. An acquaintance who went to Manhattan for a few weeks reports that one night he saw a woman with eight dogs on leashes; they were jointly fertilizing two blocks of pavement. (Maybe the fertilization is what makes concrete grow over all the grass in big cities.) The caution for running in New York and similar environments is to always run in the daylight, because you'll be able to see more easily where you are stepping and what you almost stepped into. Bear in mind that the soles of running shoes are usually built in such a way that they'll pick up and store anything soft for quite a long time.

The major problem with running in cities and along heavily traveled highways, of course, isn't the doggy diamonds, but the pollution that hangs in the air. The problem is not as radical if you can run near or along roads where the traffic is heavy but moving constantly. High concentrations of pollution come from idling cars, such as at city intersections, during rush hour traffic that backs up bumper-to-bumper, where people are double-parked waiting for someone to come out of a store while the engine is idling, while police cruisers sit waiting for a speeder with the car idling. Cars traveling at 55 or 60 or 65 mph are polluting less than cars that are going nowhere. Try to avoid running near such high concentrations of pollution. The crap in the air in cities is getting incredibly worse and it has a way of accumulating in your lungs and your bloodstream. Certain cities, of course, are worse for pollution than others. Washington, D.C., is terrible because it is situated in a natural depression, a sort of huge bowl, and the pollution, without a strong wind to blow it away, just sits there patiently and gets thicker; in Los Angeles the mountains hold it where it is and it takes a mighty strong wind off the ocean to move it. San Francisco, on the other hand, has almost constant ocean breezes, so pollution is blown inland as soon as it is manufactured.

It isn't necessary to desert the city you live in or near, of course. You can protect yourself by taking certain precautions. For instance, if you are near a high pollution area, you might want to modify your running habits so that you run in the early morning; the streets are a little more deserted and it's generally a bit cooler so that some of the day's pollution is wiped away and the air is fresher. There are also surgical masks available, but they filter out only part of the pollution.

Do not kid yourself into believing that if you run in a city park you are safe from pollution. Plants breathe in carbon dioxide, but cars produce carbon monoxide, and trees and bushes don't take that in; plants don't like it any more than people do. Bruce Dern used to run in a park, hoping to avoid the LA smog; as he found out, though, the park setting does nothing practical to help you if there's pollution in the air; the pollution formed nodules on his lungs and eventually they caused one of his lungs to collapse. He's still running and doing very well in his daily training, but it was a long road back after the collapsed lung.

Take opportunities during the weekend at least to escape the city atmosphere to do some running in a country environment. Your lungs could use the vacation. Run in the morning if possible. Eat plenty of fruits, as they have a way of extracting the pollution from your body.

YOUR ENEMY, THE CAR

The automobile is not bad by itself. But automobiles in numbers create pollution that the atmosphere cannot dissolve because the system is overloaded. And automobiles are bad when someone incompetent gets behind the wheel.

The automobile (coupled with the driver) is probably the runner's single most dangerous enemy.

My own rule of thumb, which I repeat over and over and over until it becomes monotonous, is simple: Treat every automobile as though it is out to kill you. That way, when the one out of 50,000 that is going to try to kill you makes its attempt, you'll be prepared for it.

Automobiles are from 18 to 45 times as heavy as the average female runner. Trucks and buses are even heavier. If you feel you are unable, like Superman, to stop a car that weighs two or three tons or a truck that weighs 10 tons, don't assume that you have the right-of-way at an intersection—even if you know that technically you do. Runners who argue with cars and trucks that are moving are taking leave of their senses.

Let the car go through the intersection even though you have the right-of-way. Just keep running in place or do a stretching exercise against a telephone pole to keep yourself loose. When it is safe to cross, cross. Don't assume that a car is automatically going to stop for you, even though laws in some states insist that they must. Lose a few seconds rather than losing a few months hobbling around with a leg in a cast. Even if a driver waves you through, don't take the invitation; wave him through instead.

I've had instances where punks in cars have tried to see how close they could come to hitting me while I was running in the bike lane; a miscalculation in my step could have very easily sent me to the hospital. Being the untrusting soul that I am, though, I'm always ready to dive for the side of the road when I hear the car's tires crunching the debris that builds up in the bike lane or when I hear the tires hitting the little reflectors that are built into the roads here in California.

When a runner named Hank Austin was running in Michigan last winter, a motorist attempted to scare him by aiming his car at Hank. The motorist succeeded in doing what he had intended. Hank was duly scared. Hank wrote the license number down and recorded the exact sequence of events. What the motorist didn't know was that Hank Austin was a deputy sheriff who also happens to be a hardcore runner. The next day Hank presented his story to the county prosecutor and told the prosecutor that he could identify the driver of the car. The prosecutor issued a warrant against the driver for felonious assault with an automobile. He was arrested the following day. (Although you have certain rights under the law, do not assume that the automobile driver knows what they are. The automobile driver usually doesn't know his air filter from his oil pump. And don't attempt to make a citizen's arrest when you're on foot and the offender is behind the wheel of a car.)

Before wandering off on a tangent, let's examine a few of the most common instances you'll likely encounter in your continual sharing of the roads with the automobiles of America:

The first rule is to take every precaution to make sure drivers see that you are sharing the road with them. Wear bright clothing, especially at dawn and dusk, when the natural light is especially uncertain. After dark, run with extreme caution; wear some sort of reflective material on or over your clothing or else stay off the roads. If you run after dark on little-traveled roads, don't let your mind wander so that you don't hear the

approach of a car or see its headlights. The best practice for night running is to step off the roadway until the car is safely past; one never knows what a sedate old lady will do when she sees a figure in white coming at her out of the night; the usual response is to let the car get out of control, and when that happens, the car usually goes in the direction of whatever scared the driver. Night running demands very special safety precautions and should always be done with a companion and near home. Also get in the habit of carrying an identification card somewhere on your person so if there is an accident, your family can be contacted; the card should also contain your blood type and any information about medications to which you might be allergic; there are necklaces available that have the pertinent information printed on them.

Always run facing traffic; in other words, run the left side of the road. That way, you and the approaching cars theoretically have more of a chance to see—and avoid—each other. Unfortunately, the people who came up with that rule do not run some of the country roads the rest of us do; there are some tight two-lane country roads where it is suicide to follow that rule. Use common sense. If there is a blind curve coming up, run on the outside of the curve, and then cautiously, because if a driver loses control of his car, he's going to slide to the outside of the curve, because that's how centrifugal force works. You are safer out there, though, because he can see you in advance of reaching the curve because you will have more room in which to maneuver your body out of the driver's way.

Never run on highways or freeways. Never. When I was in college, a portion of Interstate 80 in Pennsylvania was being completed and for months no cars knew anything about it. The stretch was eight miles long. I used to run it every Saturday morning as part of a long run. The shoulders were new asphalt, there was no litter, there was no traffic. It was like running in another world. Unfortunately, people soon found out about the magic stretch and from that point onward only a loon would think of running on it. Traffic along large highways moves too fast; you have absolutely no time to react if something goes wrong, and things often do. You can just as easily be killed by a tractor-trailer' retread tire coming apart and bashing you upside the head as you can by being hit by the truck itself.

Run in the presence of automobiles as though your life depended on it. This is being repeated, yes, but it can't be repeated too often. Do not trust any driver. Nuts come in all shapes and sizes. Treat cars as though they're out to get you, because all it takes to do the job is the one you weren't paying attention to on that last run.

Whether or not you personally have any interest in cars, take time to learn the sounds the engine makes when the car is taking a turn, slowing down, when the driver quickly pulls his foot off the accelerator, or when the power is applied to the engine. The car is talking to you, and you should be listening to it. If a car is coming up behind you on a two-lane road (or if you happen to be running on the right side of the road at a portion of road where it would be dangerous to run against traffic) and you can tell by the sound of the engine that the driver just pulled his foot off the accelerator, it probably indicates that the driver just realized you were there; this would indicate also that he may not be in full

control of his car at that point, so a judicious move farther to your right would be in order in case he still isn't in complete control when he comes by you.

Also, try not to do extremely long runs on well-traveled roadways. You'll be getting very tired within the last few miles, your reactions will be sluggish, and your concentration will be less than acute: if you find yourself getting into that dazed state that occasionally happens when you run, head for safer roads where you're not likely to get yourself into a troubling situation.

And lastly, give some indication of what you intend to do at intersections or when you find it necessary to cross lanes so that any cars in the vicinity are given ample warning. I've seen some runners dart out into a road without making any kind of indication that they were going to do anything but keep running in the direction they were headed; if a driver is confused at that point, it isn't his or her fault.

Most drivers aren't out to kill or maim runners; many of the drivers are runners themselves. It is still best, though, to avoid cars and drivers when possible. When it's not possible, take great care to not do anything foolish. It only takes one mistake to put you out of running for a long time.

THE CANINE CONNECTION

Runners may be put into a lot of categories: fast and slow, morning and evening, young and old, serious and recreational... appetizing and unappetizing. Get a roomful of runners and it's almost possible to divide them in half between those who have had problems with dogs and those who have not. There is no middle ground' you've either been attacked by a dog or you haven't.

Some runners seem to send off an aroma that draws dogs faster than the newest dog food being huckstered on television commercials. It has to be something like aroma, because it seems impossible to explain otherwise how some runners who've been running for 20 years have never been attacked by a dog while others who have been running less than six months have been attacked several times.

There is strong feeling between the two groups of runners about what should be done to protect runners against dogs. The never-attacked usually find it terrible that some runners should have elaborate plots hatched against man's best friend, while those who have been attacked become tired of hearing those who haven't been attacked defending the canines and admonishing the scar-bearers that they must have provoked the dog.

Whatever your stand on the matter, it is wise to have a plan to defend yourself. Some male runners shout the dog down or make threatening sounds and gestures that often confuse and disorient the dog. Others carry defensive weapons (the most workable being an automobile antenna, which is light and can be telescoped down to almost no size at all, but which can be used as an effective whip at the first advance of a lip-smacking doggie).

Some women have found that a dog can be talked down when it proposes an attack, although you've got to be a fast-talker if he's already made up his mind to do you in. Other women contend that ignoring the dog will discourage it. And others claim that the best way to avoid dog attacks is to set up courses that do not match territory frequented by dogs.

Whatever your approach to the dog problem, bear in mind that dogs are usually "civilized" and "domesticated" animals, if not in every habit, at least in the fact that they live in conjunction with man's civilization. Consequently, they have at some point in their lives been accustomed to accepting orders from people. Therefore, be prepared to command the dog, in no uncertain terms, to get the hell away from you or you'll make life miserable for him. The direct approach works with most dogs, especially if it is made with a threatening gesture (as long as you aren't dealing with a trained attack dog, for whom threatening gestures are an invitation to take off your arm). For the small percentage of those dogs who do not cower at the voice of mankind, any auto supply store sells antennas.

LOST IN THE WILDS OF CIVILIZATION

One of the most confusing creations of mankind is the typical suburb. Oh, there are some that are laid out like a piece of graph paper. But most of them are, from the air, like the convolutions of the human brain.

Anyone who's tried to follow directions through a suburban labyrinth very quickly feels like a rat in a maze. It is almost as easy to get lost in some cities, where the city was laid out according to the lay of the land rather than by some geometrical pattern.

Women have a tendency to be less Lewis & Clarkish than men. This, like everything else, is not an across-the-board generalization. (Again, it may be due to boys being allowed to wander far afield as youngsters while girls were often confined to playing house in the yard.) As you become stronger and more ambitious as a runner, the day will come when the urge will surface to go farther than you ever have before. You'll attempt to hold yourself back, but the urge is very strong because it is joined firmly with a feeling of joy with the world, and once this happens, there's virtually no holding that person back. The old courses will seem woefully inadequate, stale, and boring. The wanderlust will overcome you and you'll find your feet taking you into new areas of the city or the suburbs.

Much like you would in the wilderness, tell someone when you are going out running, what direction you are going in, and how long you expect to be gone. If this is not possible (and even if it is), begin to carry some change (at least the cost of a phone call) in a little pouch you can sew inside your shorts to that, should you get lost or need help in strange territory, you will not be without resources.

Several runners have suggested window decals, so that other runners who are in some sort of distress can identify a friendly house to run to for assistance. The idea has merit if it can be standardized, but in the meantime a runner is pretty much on her own.

Getting lost can become frustrating, distressing and—in cold weather especially—downright dangerous as the runner wearies and the body temperature can no longer ward off the cold. The best solution is not to run more than a block or two into new territory at any one time. Also remember that when you turn around to come back from a new portion of your running course, the streets will look entirely different because you are seeing them from the opposite direction, and this can very easily disorient you—especially if you are tired or moving faster than the mind can sort out the proper turns.

Neighborhoods in both cities and suburbs can change radically within the space of a few blocks. The street you felt perfectly safe on before may look like juvenile delinquent haven four blocks further along, so be very cautious in adding new and unexplored streets to your run.

IN SUMMARY

It is very easy to look back over this chapter and feel depressed about the many potential dangers waiting for runners. The word that makes the subject positive, however, is potential. As long as dangers are kept as potentials rather than as actuals, running can be beneficial both physically and mentally. Although it can be safely stated that not every run brings on the fabled “runner’s high,” it can just as safely be stated that no runs need to bring tragedy.

The obstacles and dangers that nature and civilization put in the way of the runner are likewise there for the walker, the cyclist, for virtually anyone. Life is something of a course through the obstacles. A person who is careful can negotiate the obstacles successfully at whatever speed is comfortable for that person’s life. Running merely intensifies what other human beings meet along the road of life.

The intensity, however, is what makes life all the sweeter. It is certainly what brings on the “runner’s high” and it is what leaves a runner flushed after a particularly satisfying run that may have taken the runner to new accomplishments even on the seemingly mundane mid-week training run. It is the way the foot falls so surely, so firmly on the curve of the local bridle-path. It is the sweet morning spring air following a hard winter that rushes through the mouth and into lungs, expanding as the runner moves up a hill that four weeks before required a walking break halfway to the top.

The dangers runners face often are from their own running. The injury most often comes from overtraining, from upping mileage too rapidly, from becoming so enthusiastic that common sense has no room in the runner’s castle of dreams. Shin splints and runner’s knee and black toenails and sore ankles and tired muscles are the female runner’s greatest threat to safety.

The other dangers are there, certainly, to a degree proportionate with the area the woman runs in. But the majority of the dangers can be avoided by dredging up cautions we all heard over and over and over as children: Look before you cross the street; Don’t go out by yourself after dark; Stay away from those woods over there; Don’t fool with

strange dogs; Get back here when you're supposed to or we'll send the cops after you; Don't play by the freeway; etc.

All the messages are there, much like the grooves on a phonograph record; all we need do is play it back every once in a while. And there's lots of time in which to play it back on the run.

IN RETROSPECT, 2018

I look back at this mass of information and advice with mixed reactions. Certainly, when it was written, way back in the Cotton Days of 1978, women were just beginning to become involved in long-distance running. (Certainly, there had been the occasional female who ran a century ago or who ran with the guys in the 1960s and '70s, but that female was rare.)

In editing this book I had surveyed 100 female runners and used the resulting input in some 50 "profiles" in the back of the book, and attempted to use their level of knowledge of the sport as a measuring stick for what should and should not be included. It was a challenge to write the chapter because while I didn't want to scare off women runners, I didn't want to blithely assume there were no dangers out there.

Were I to write the chapter today, some of the emphasis on various topics would shift—some subtly and others fairly dramatically.

I would still stress the potential dangers of running away from civilization. Nature is not the benign environment it is depicted as in early Disney movies. As an example, on April 23, 1994, Barbara Schoener, 40, was on a training run along the latter portions of the Western States 100 course, not far from civilization, when she was attacked and killed by a mountain lion. In July of 1995 Marcie Trent, 77, a legend in ultra running, and her son-in-law, Larry Waldron, 45, a well-respected saxophonist and long-distance runner, were killed by a grizzly bear near Anchorage; Waldron's 14-year-old son escaped by diving into a ravine and climbing a tree. These things do happen when one runs in or near nature. Marcie had been running for decades and lived in Alaska and often ran along the McHugh Creek Trail. Obviously, it would not have helped if she had been running with a group, as the bear was intent on destruction.

The fact that so many women do run in groups is a very positive aspect of the women's running movement. Besides offering safety (both in the wilderness or in the middle of sometimes-savage civilization), running with a group offers enormous amounts of motivation and support.

Yesterday's runners (both men and women) received a great deal of their information by reading running magazines and books. Today information is gathered from various sources, many of them designed for short attention spans. In that change-over, much simple wisdom has been lost:

- Run against traffic.
- If you have the option of running on a concrete sidewalk or an asphalt bike path that runs parallel, always pick the asphalt path—the surface is actually several times softer than the hard concrete.
- Simple things like that.
- Or like this one, which is often totally ignored today: ***Don't become distracted.***
 - The number of gadgets that are attached to running today is mind-boggling. And they are all unnecessary—and some of them are downright dangerous.
 - Cars and trucks continue to be one of the most common dangers to runners, and in many cases these days, it isn't the fault of the driver when a runner and vehicle meet. Runners today are distracted by music pumping into their ears, by electronic running aids, by being unable to train the mind to focus on the long-run rather than on the short-term.
 - Ironically, all of the gadgets associated with running today have made the modern runners less efficient and effective, not moreso. I could get your eyes to glaze over by quoting statistics that essentially prove that even with more and more runners today (often five or six times as many) as there were in the late 1970s, the race results, taken on the whole, are not getting better, but are regularly getting worse.

One of the prime charms of running has always been its inherent simplicity. Unlike most other sports, very little equipment is necessary to make a go of it. And the activity itself is as ancient as the rise of human beings. It is, in fact, what has allowed the human animal to emerge at the head of the pack: outrun something that wants to eat you, and run down something you want to eat. Simple. Or, as some of the running philosophers of the 1970s used to say, in summing up running: Running is simple: put one foot in front of the other then alternate.

Every runner, at every level, would benefit from going back to the basics. Chuck the fancy gadgets and the passing training fads, and believe only 1% of what you're told about how eating such and such a food is going to make you a better and faster runner, because it ain't.

Build your running program slowly and carefully. Get a lot of rest (the training effect occurs when you are resting and recovering from the training, which actually breaks down the body). Eat a balanced diet. Drink sufficient water. Relax when you run; a running style that works for one person does not necessarily work for every runner; run enough and your body makes its own adjustments. Keep your brain engaged and your eyes alert for anything that may pose a danger to you. Run with friends when it's convenient; part two of that admonition is if you want to run better, occasionally arrange to run with people who are better and faster than you are so you can stretch a little. Use common sense in approaching your running. ***And have fun.***