

Lace 'em Up.

How running shoes (well, mostly what you do in them) can
make life better.

Will O'Keefe

Dear Reader,

I think running is great. My writing, especially when influenced by my personal experiences, will show this quite clearly. I know that not everyone in this world shares my love, respect and curiosity for all-things running, but I hope that this paper at least raises your eyebrows. You see, there is so much more to running than most people understand. Running isn't just about tortuously putting one foot in front of the other in order to complete the gym mile under 15:00. It's not just about losing weight either. Heck, running isn't even just about getting fitter and faster. Explaining the multitude of benefits running can bring to one's life is no simple task. In fact, outlining the benefits of running in just twelve pages is no light work either. But I will do my best. I really hope this project can shed some light on the mysterious life of a distance runner. Not many people have the slightest inkling of what my relationship with running is like. This ignorance leads to questions such as: How do you run for fun? Do you just run when you're bored? Do you get tired? I don't have an easy answer to these questions and most of the time I give the same standard "I run to get faster for track" answer. Although that statement is true, it is not even close to being the full, correct answer. In this paper I hope to paint a picture of why I run, why other people run and why I think everyone should run. I don't just want you to understand that running is great for you. I want you to understand HOW and WHY. Bottom line, I think everyone should be a runner. My primary goal in this paper is to convince you that running is more than you ever thought it was, means more than you ever thought it meant and can do more than you ever thought it could. Running is the best.

Will O'Keefe

Energy draining, muscles aching, lungs asphyxiating.

X-rays may show bone damage in rare cases.

Energetically begun, uninspiringly terminated.

Radically effective in changing lives if persevered.

Certainly not going to kill you.

Interestingly healing, peaceful and awe inspiring.

Sure it can be quite challenging, and maybe just plain awful at times.

Everything in life is hard, exercise is just physical

Don't let fatigue make a coward out of you.

-Steve Prefontaine, American Distance Running Legend

Mile 10: 6:00

What is pain? Should one enjoy it? This isn't pain.

This is peace.

I've run away. I've run towards.

What are problems? What is stress?

All I know is the sound my shoes make when they slap the trail.

The sound of my breath, strong and steady.

The ache in my legs, begging for mercy.

The strength of Will.

Mile 11: 5:47

I don't want this journey to end.

I don't want to stop running.

I don't want to stop feeling what I'm feeling and thinking what I'm thinking.

I just want to run harder. But I have to hold back.

I just want to run longer. But I have 6 miles tomorrow.

This journey of body, mind, and spirit.

Is what I live for.

It's what I love.

Running.¹

Mile 12: 5:26

A lot of people say they love running because of how they feel afterward. Not me. Well, I love that, too, but it's also so much fun while I'm out there.

-Dick Beardsley, All-Time Great American Marathoner

Will O'Keefe

Mrs. Connolly

English 8A

1 April 2017

Why Run?

Running is awful, say some. Running is great, say others. Running is an enigma, says everyone else. How can this simple, natural form of bipedal locomotion elicit such a wide array of reactions? It is not because running is literally better or worse for some people, it is because individual's experience with running can vary quite a bit on the good/bad scale. Running has very little influence on some people's lives, while some are obsessed with it, even dependent on it. No matter the reasons for these differing experiences, and contrary to the beliefs of many discouraged one-time runners, one argument can always be made. No running is the worst experience.

Humans are built to run. Every muscle, ligament, tendon, bone, joint and organ in our body is built to help us endure this primordial action. Take your hips for example, why are you (assuming you have a normal range of flexibility) able to pull your knee to your chest? Walking would never require such a range of motion, right? Correct, only a need to move faster than walking pace requires the large range of motion of the human body. Running requires higher knee drive, greater arm swing and harder contractions of muscles that would never be required for walking. No matter how persistent some may be in their complaints of "I just can't run," EVERYONE can (assuming they are not injured or disabled). The human body loves to run and running simply makes it stronger.

The main reason people start running is to lose weight. And bravo to them, they have stumbled upon the best form of pound-shedding there is. Running burns more calories than any other form of exercise, up to, and even exceeding, 900 calories per hour for a 200 pound person (Dack 2). Yes, that means one can "run off" a few Twinkies in as little as 30 minutes. But if you really want to lose a lot of

weight, you should pair your new exercise routine with a better diet. But in all honesty, if you eat the same as you always have and start running, you will lose weight. Running is a double-edged sword when it comes to fat loss. Running burns calories while you run, and in the hours afterward while your body recovers and your metabolism remains supercharged (Dack 2).

Obviously body-image isn't everything. But looking good, when paired with actually feeling good, can make people much more confident, happy and healthy. Many people exercise to lose weight, and they do indeed lose it. However, they don't often stop there. They keep going. They keep getting fitter, stronger and most importantly for some, better looking. This internal motivation to better themselves is natural for all humans, and running is a great way to satisfy it. It offers a myriad of physical benefits on top of fat burning.

Running can make your aching joints and bones simply feel better. Running increases the amount of healing, oxygen-rich blood that makes its way to your joints and strengthens the ligaments against soreness, pain and injury (Dack 4). Wouldn't it be nice to never have an aching back, knee, ankle or hip? Similarly, running strengthens nearly every muscle in your body. Your legs become stronger, more flexible and definitely more defined. Your core becomes sturdier and similarly more attractive (think six-pack). Even your arms and chest can become trimmer and better looking through the repetitive arm swing running entails.

Although running can make you feel and look better. It also strengthens your body in ways that aren't so obvious. Your heart becomes more powerful, and literally bigger. Your lungs and circulatory system become much more efficient. These changes cause normal, everyday activities to take less effort, energy and even time. Jason Fitzgerald, a USA Track and Field coach, has this to say about running's effect on his daily life; "...if I'm helping a friend move, I can carry boxes all day long and it's not a big deal" (Fetters 5). Basically, running makes you feel stronger, healthier and more energized.

Running is not purely physical. The art of running strengthens the mind and spirit just as much, if not more than, the body. Literally “going the distance” requires people to challenge themselves, set high goals and sometimes push themselves harder than they ever have. The prospect of improving becomes addicting, and the fitter one gets, the harder it is to improve. This constant struggle to run faster, farther and with more ease forces one to become a better-rounded person. One must become more resilient, more determined and more goal oriented than they ever have been before.

The physical benefits of running collide with the mental benefits quite often. Running releases hormones and chemicals such as endorphins and dopamine that make you feel extremely happy and peaceful. Running can even induce your brain to release endocannabinoids, molecules that literally make you “high” (Fetters 3).

Everyone has an “escape,” a way of finding relief from the stress of everyday life. Running could simply be the best such getaway. Running removes you physically from your problems (out of sight, out of mind). It also takes your spirit to a new place. The chemicals your body releases during running combine with the rhythmic serenity of your body moving fluidly over the earth. Your mind strays from negative thoughts, sometimes from all thought. Running has proven to relieve stress, possibly the leading cause of a plethora of physical, mental and emotional problems. Why would you not want to escape from stress in the best possible way?

Running has a sort of magic to it. Beyond simply the benefits to your health, well-being, body, mind and soul. It can take you on a miraculous journey. It can show you things about the world and about yourself that you never would have uncovered. Running can be the answer to not just some, but all of your problems. Running can change your life’s trajectory.²

Running allows me to set my mind free. Nothing seems impossible. Nothing unattainable.

-Kara Goucher, American Olympic Distance Runner

Shoes and Spikes³

Shoes:

- New Balance 890 v2 - approximately 400 miles 
- Asics Gel-Nimbus 14 - approx. 600 miles 
- Mizuno Wave Rider 16 (orange) - approx. 550 miles 
- Mizuno Wave Rider 16 (blue) - approx. 600 miles
- Adidas Response Boost - approx. 600 miles 
- Adidas Energy Boost 2 (salmon) - approx. 650 miles 
- Adidas Energy Boost 2 (dark blue) - approx. 550 miles
- Adidas Energy Boost 2 (grey) - approx. 550 miles
- Adidas Energy Boost 2 (light blue) - approx. 850 miles
- Adidas Energy Boost 2 (black) - approx. 550 miles
- Adidas Energy Boost 2 (neon green) - approx. 650 miles
- Brooks Glycerin 14 - approx. 600 miles 
- Adidas Energy Boost 2 (zebra print) - approx. 200 miles

Spikes:

- ❖ Asics Hyper MD (middle distance) 4 (silver) - best race: 5:12 mile 
- ❖ Asics Hyper MD 4 (white) - best race: 4:34 mile 



- ❖ Saucony Kilkenny XC 5 - best races: 1:25 600m, 16:32 5k



- ❖ Nike Zoom Victory - best race: 4:23 mile



- ❖ Nike Zoom Victory XC 2 - best race 15:20 3-mile



- ❖ Nike Zoom Victory 2 (white) - best races: 50.1 400m, 1:54 800m, 4:19 mile



- ❖ Adidas Ambition 3 - best race: 1:55 800m



- ❖ Nike Zoom Victory XC 3 - best race: 15:30 3-miles



- ❖ Nike Zoom Victory 2 (red and black) - best race: TBD

A pair of running shoes and a dream can take you anywhere.

-Unknown

17 Tips for Buying Running Shoes

1. Do not just buy the ones that look cool.
2. Do not take anything you read online about shoes for granted.
3. Do not order shoes online if you've never tried them on.
4. Do not buy shoes without trying them on.
5. Do not buy shoes without running in them (yes most stores will let you run in them).
6. Always, always, always at least try the shoes on.
7. When you try on shoes, try on both of them.
8. Tie the shoes as if you own them.
9. Do not be afraid to look stupid at the store while trying on shoes.
10. Always ask questions about the shoes.
11. When you go out to try on shoes, wear normal socks (not excessively thick or thin).
12. Do not immediately buy into "breakthrough" or "new" running shoe technologies.
13. Do not be afraid TO buy into new technologies once they have proven themselves.
14. Read reviews.
15. Be deliberate.
16. Never settle.
17. Once you buy running shoes, USE them for their intended purpose.

Want a strong, solid relationship that is willing to go the distance? Get to know your running shoes.

-Dean Karnazes, Extreme Ultra-Marathon Legend

Change

Chris was not happy. He had a college degree, a good job, a nice apartment and a wonderful girlfriend. His life was "whole," he had everything he needed. At least everything he thought he needed. Yet, he was not happy. Chris had settled. His new life with all of its "niceness" and "wholeness" seemed like it should've been enough to make him happy, but he found himself to be quite discouraged at times.

Chris often left for work in the morning and found himself to feel unsettled. He didn't mind getting up for work, he didn't mind putting in the hours, he didn't mind doing the tasks his job entailed. But it all felt like such a broken record. His workday repeated itself almost identically day after day. Chris got all of his work done, but he did not feel accomplished. He felt like the smallest cog in the biggest machine. He had importance, but he could easily be replaced. Chris didn't desire attention or recognition. He just wanted to feel like he is more than a replaceable battery.

When his workday was over, Chris drove home. He enjoyed the idea of being at home after a long day at work, but the idea was the only thing he enjoyed about it. After college he bought his own house, 200 miles away from his parents. His girlfriend worked nights and they usually only saw each other on the weekends. His house was empty, and a television could only keep him company for so long. Chris itched to get out and be around other people, but he had made no friends in his new town, besides his girlfriend, and his co-workers had a clique-like social structure that Chris despised. Chris was lonely.

Chris found himself to have an overwhelming sense of discontentment. He wasn't completely unhappy, it just always seemed like there was something in his life he either wanted or needed that he just plain didn't have. This feeling began as an itch. An itch to get up off the couch and do something, an itch to go out and meet new people, an itch to make his life more interesting. One day, this itch grew so strong that Chris had no other option than to at least attempt to scratch it. He decided to actively pursue whatever it was that we needed in his life to fill the gaps. He put on his jacket, laced up his shoes and walked outside. He stood on his front porch for about two minutes, feeling kind of foolish that he believed for a second that he could find the answer to his life's fulfillment outside in his neighborhood. He began to turn around and head back into the house to continue his gestation in front of the TV, until something down the street caught his eye. It was a man running. It was pretty cold out that day and Chris wondered why someone would want to be out in this weather, much less running in it. Chris thought that the man must be crazy, like all other people who "run for fun."

Chris turned to proceed back into the house until he heard it, "Hey, you!" He quickly turned around to find the running man approaching him, waving. "Can I help you?" said Chris, a little confused. "Yeah man, I just wanted to see if you would be interested in running the upcoming 5k that is raising money for cancer patients. Its only twenty-five bucks and you get a t-shirt." Chris wasn't sure what to say, he didn't particularly like the idea of running a 5k, but how could he resist helping raise money for cancer patients? And just like that, Chris signed up for his first 5k.

The 5k was 5 weeks from that day, and Chris knew he needed to be prepared. He didn't want to show up and get last at this thing, that would be awful. He knew he needed to train, but had no idea where to begin. Should he just go run a 5k every day? Should he do some squats? He decided that Google could most likely answer these questions. After fifteen minutes of reading about training for your first 5k, Chris got ready to start his first training run. He laced up his "running" shoes (the closest thing he was were some tennis shoes he used during his brief stint with tennis in high school), bundled up in some warmer clothing and stepped outside. *"Start off with a 10 minute jog in one direction, and then turn around and try to run back in 10 minutes without increasing effort, this is a good test for a beginning runner to see what type of shape their in."* Chris began to run. He hardly made it 100 yards down the street before feeling some pain. His knees began to ache, his heart started beating furiously and his breathing became very strained. He slowed down to a nearly-walking pace and just trudged on. "What am I doing out here?" he wondered. "Why am I out here running when I could be resting on my comfortable couch?" he began to wonder until his mind drifted back to why he stepped out the door today. He couldn't tell the running man no, he wanted to support the cause the 5k was raising money for and he wasn't about to get last in this 5k. So on he ran. He made it to the ten minute mark and stopped his stopwatch (he knew the watch his parents got him would be good for something). He felt pretty bad, his legs ached, breath was hard to come by and his heart felt like it was about to beat out of his chest. "How am I so tired from just a ten minute jog?" he wondered. He began his journey back, and something strange happened. He began to start feeling a little better. His legs began to loosen, his breathing relaxed a little and he began to actually pick up the pace. "Hey, this doesn't feel so bad" Chris thought. He picked it up again, and again and again. With each acceleration his legs felt more and more tired and his breathing got heavier and heavier, but he felt better and better. For some reason the feeling of pushing himself was sort of relieving. So he pushed harder, and harder. The faster he went the better he felt. Physically, he felt like he might fall apart. But his spirit was soaring. He hadn't felt this type of pure euphoria since he was a young kid, playing tag outside with his friends.

Chris finished up his run, sprinting down his street to complete the return trip in nine minutes and forty-three seconds. "Faster than the way out," he thought to himself, mentally patting himself on the back. Chris felt accomplished. For the first time since he graduated college, he felt like he had actually succeeded in doing something worthwhile. He bettered himself that day. He couldn't wait to run the next day.

He ran the next day. And the next week. And the next year. Chris kept running until he left his feelings of emptiness, loneliness, inadequateness and discontentment of any kind in the dust.

And so everything changed.

Start somewhere today. Don't put it off. You can do something, no matter how "small" you think it is in terms of your long-term goal. Every step you take is one you'll be thankful for when you get there. Remember: You're lapping everyone who's still on the couch.

-Caressa Sharp, woman who learned to deal with stress, and lost 50 pounds along the way, through running



This is me. I'm running on an overpass service road about 5.5 miles down the trail that I do a lot of my 10+ mile runs on.

This picture doesn't explain everything. But no such picture exists. You see, running is never just about reaching a destination or just about accomplishing a goal. It is a journey. And if you're truly in it for the long run (pun intended), you must learn to enjoy the ride.

This picture shows one of my favorite "stops" on my running journey. When I reach this checkpoint on a 13 mile run, I just feel happy. A lot of times this is about where I start to feel very good on a long run. My body is finally completely loose and relaxed and my mind is wandering and peaceful. I am physically about as far away from my house as running takes me (other than out of town trips), and I'm mentally as far away from stress and tension as I can ever be. It is here that I feel the deep peace that running elicits.

This picture represents a lot of what I love about running. It shows how running can take you on a journey. It shows that running can give simple peace. It shows that running can help you find beauty in the world, even in place you wouldn't expect to find it. Getting to this spot requires running through part of Granite City, hitting the paved MCT trail that runs toward Edwardsville and running past bare farmer's fields, crappy neighborhoods and a dumpy trailer park. But then all of the sudden you climb a man-made incline up to this spot under the overpass and you are taken aback by the unexpected beauty.

It is difficult to explain all of the emotions that I feel every time I reach this spot. The dozens of great experiences I've had here contribute to the deep connection I feel with it. Now, even if my run is going badly and I feel tired or stressed, when I reach this spot I feel good again. The physical and mental strength I have acquired by running out here again and again all comes to the surface and a deeper peace than can be explained by words on a page comes over me.

I feel safe. I feel strong. I feel complete. Running may be a journey, but it always feels like home.⁴

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¹ This piece is my favorite. I really wanted to paint a picture of how the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of running meld with each other. I simply tried to effectively convey my thoughts and sensations that I experience while out on a typical Sunday-morning long run. I wanted it to have a smooth, unforced flow to it because it really was pretty easy to write because I knew exactly what I wanted it to say. I want the reader to know that this piece is not fictional in anyway, it is inspired by my true sensations, memories and experiences.

² In writing his piece I really had to limit myself. I definitely said what I wanted to say just not in nearly as many words as I would have liked too. I could simply go on about the reasons running is great for you all day. My curiosity for running knowledge is insatiable and that made this piece very easy to write. The only difficult part was figuring out how exactly I would summarize what could be endless explanations.

³ I'm pretty proud of this piece. At first I was just brainstorming with ideas for some sort of list and I started making a list of my training shoes and it ended up becoming pretty cool. I think this piece, in a very subtle, simple way, tells my story. You can see how many miles I've run, how fast I've run and how my mode of "transportation" to my goals is a pair of shoes.

⁴ This piece is not very long. I thought it could be a lot longer, but it didn't work out that way. It's hard to explain how important some of my running "traditions" are to me. They give my peace in a life that can sometimes feel out of control. I wanted this piece to explain how the simplest joys of running are what make it so addicting. Telling about one specific location that alone has dozens of great memories tied to it hopefully shows how much meaning running can bring to life. The simplest things mean the world to me sometimes.