

The Compleat Idiot's Guide to Stupidity

by John Farrow

When you think about it, running is really pretty easy. If you know how to walk without falling down, all you do is put one foot in front of the other more quickly than you do when you walk. In fact, it's probably the next thing we try to do after we learn to walk. Of course, as with any other passion, anything worth doing is liable to lead to stupidity.

The following is a guide for those of you who maybe don't recognize good stupidity when you see it (or, heaven forbid, when you do it). We first offer a few basic rules of thumb, followed by a series of threshold questions to help you determine what to do next.

Tough Guys Don't Finish.

Running is addictive, no doubt about it. Most people who start and continue with a running program have simply never felt so good. Consequently, they can tend to either over-do things or continue running long after even a shred of common sense would dictate otherwise.

Plus, if you happen to be a runner of the male persuasion (and odds are that this applies to one in two of you), then you have a better than average chance of being afflicted with Tough Guy Syndrome. This condition, which first manifests itself in early adolescence, can be induced by school-yard bullies or over-zealous coaches, and is often aggravated in later life by testosterone and beer.

In runners, the effects can be devastating. Some have been known to continue races with broken bones almost to the brink of unconsciousness. Others simply run themselves into the ground until their bodies begin to shut down due to over-use, resulting in lengthy, non-running recuperation.

Anal Is As Anal Does.

If you are a runner, you are likely goal-oriented, and goal-oriented people generally have a plan to help them achieve their goals. However, the anal runner loses sight of the fact that the plan is not the end in itself.

Suppose your goal is to complete a marathon to qualify you for Boston. Somewhere in your plan a

few weeks before the race you have a 20-mile run scheduled. Now suppose that the day of that scheduled 20-mile run dawns with freezing rain and ice all around. The anal runner knows that the schedule has been set for better or worse. He has to go out - but he might not return in one piece.

A Pasta Feed Is Not A Pasta Trough.

Running requires lots of energy and many races offer pasta feeds the night before the event. This is true even for races as short as a 5K. Human nature being what it is, however, piggy see, piggy do.

Race organizers clearly have their runners' interests at heart, but what you ate two or three days ago is what will be fueling the race. A big plate of pasta the night before will just give you an unpleasant, bloated feeling while likely annoying those behind you.

Will You Still Respect Me In The Morning?

Your body, that is. With races in all sorts of exotic locales, in addition to the new and exciting things to do and see, there is just no better way to liven up travel than by running a race away from home.

However, this also means that it's easy to find yourself being dragged to the starting line with margaritas and nachos on your breath and Omar & the Howlers blasting away in your head. Not optimal pre-race strategy, but understandable if you are willing to pay the painful price.

Gravity And Other Perils.

No matter how many times you have been there and done that, still, be careful. Why? Well, as runners, it is still very easy for us to (a) fall down, (b) get hit by a car, (c) be attacked by a snarling hound, or (d) all of the above. In Alaska, you also stand a good chance of being menaced by myopic moose. If one of the above should nevertheless befall you, consider the following threshold questions before continuing your run:

1. *Can you get up?*

a. *Yes.* Lucky you! Go to 2.

b. *No.* Bummer. Let loose a primal scream and have someone call 911. Forget the rest of your run.

2. *If you can get up, is there blood?*

a. *Yes, a lot.* Can you clean it up without alarming the natives? If so, go to 3.

b. *No, or not much.* Go to 3.

c. *Yes, and the blood is above the injured area.* As a general rule of thumb, any blood *above* the injured area is cause for real alarm. Strongly consider the advice in 1.b above.

3. *Once you have gotten everything properly cleaned up, can you run without pain?*

a. *Yes.* Hermes is with you! Continue with your run, but wake up and get with the program.

b. *No.* Should you continue? One way to tell is to judge the intensity of the pain at several defined points along the remainder of your run. If the pain is not in a joint and appears to subside over the course of your run, you can probably complete the run without complications.

On the other hand, if by the third step you have pain so intense that you feel faint and a brightly lit white tunnel opens in distance, you would be strongly advised discontinue your run.

Why? Pain is your body's way of screaming "*Something is wrong, very wrong, you idiot!*"

Running can aggravate whatever injury you already have and turn a mere fracture into a compound fracture, or worse. While brownie points may be given to members of the Green Berets, Marines, Navy SEALs and other counter-insurgency outfits for such conduct, that is not the case for most ordinary people, even runners.

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