

Essential Running Gear for Beginners

Running is a great way to get in shape, lose weight, de-stress after a long day, or even take some time for yourself to think and reflect. If you are new to running, or have never been a runner and are looking to get into the sport, the wide array of available merchandise can seem daunting. You have probably seen that person running along the trail with all the latest gear, but is all that really necessary? Luckily, it is possible to start running with minimal gear so that you and your wallet can stay injury-free.

Shoes Are a Runner's Best Friend

The most important thing to think about when running is the type of shoes you wear. Since the shape of everyone's foot can vary exponentially, it's important to get fitted for the proper shoe. When buying your first pair of running shoes, it is a good idea to go to a specialty running store. While you do not need to buy the most expensive shoes on the market, just buying something because it's a cheap way to get started on your new hobby is the quickest way to risk injury and burnout. Most running specialty stores have a machine that will measure your gait and your arch when you stand in a certain spot or walk a few steps. The width of your foot, your arch, and your gait should all affect your shoe-buying decision. Certain brands cater to different foot shapes, and these employees are trained to give you shoe recommendations based on your specific needs.

Socks Are Your Sole Mate

Once you have chosen your shoes, it is a good idea to invest in a decent pair of socks. There are many varieties out there, but your socks should fit your foot snugly (not too tight or you will cut off circulation) so that it does not move around inside your shoe. If your sock is too big or has too much material, the sock will move inside your shoe, causing friction and creating a "burning" sensation on the bottom of your foot. A good running sock comes up on your ankle slightly higher than the top of your shoe. If the sock hits lower than the top of your shoe, there is a good chance your shoe will rub on your ankle or foot, causing painful blisters. A good running sock is made of moisture-wicking material so that your feet stay relatively dry no matter what season you choose to run.

Run Away From Chafing and Discomfort

Once you have your feet ready to go, the next step is your clothing. Choose a shirt that is made of a light material. Moisture-wicking shirts are the best choice, because the material is designed to do just that-wick the sweat from your body to cool you off, and the material will dry a bit (not completely) as you run. If you simply run in a cotton t-shirt, the shirt will become drenched in sweat, rubbing against our skin and causing chafing. Moisture-wicking shirts are available at most major retailers, and just like your shoes and socks, it is not necessary to purchase the most expensive name-brand running clothes either.

The Pants Dance

While the shirt may be a relatively easy choice, finding pants or shorts could be more difficult. Choose a material that is flexible and will move with your body, like spandex or Lycra. If you choose to wear shorts, do a test jog or run in place in the dressing room to ensure the material does not bunch up. Since everyone's body is shaped a little differently, shorts that fit one person may not fit the next person as they should. There is nothing worse than running down the sidewalk and having to straighten your shorts every few steps because the material keeps bunching up. Not only is this annoying, but the

material rubbing against your legs can cause painful chafing as well. It's also a good idea to choose items of clothing, both shirts and pants, that have a reflective strip located on the material somewhere. This allows you to be seen in the event that you are running in the dark.

Save Your Eyes (and your energy) by Shielding Your Face

Now that you have your outfit planned, don't forget about shielding your face from the sun. It's a good idea to wear a hat, visor, or sunglasses to keep the sun out of your face. Squinting into the sun makes it hard to see your surroundings and is hard on your eyes. Shielding your face and eyes from the sun will keep you cooler and will not wear you out as quickly either.

What Motivates You to Keep Going?

After you have your clothing picked out, you are ready to run! While some runners love the solitude of a run, most people need something to motivate them, or at least distract them. Many runners even say they do not like to hear themselves breathing. It's a good idea to invest in some headphones so that you can listen to music or podcasts while you run. You can also purchase an armband so you have somewhere to store your phone while you run. An armband is just a sleeve that holds your phone and wraps around your upper arm, holding itself in place with a Velcro tab that is adjustable according to your arm size. If the armband is not comfortable, another popular choice is a thin belt that wraps around your waist. Running belts are usually narrow, with just enough space for your phone, keys, and chapstick. The belt is adjustable, and you can position the phone at any point around your waist to maximize comfort.

Your Only Competition is You

If you are just getting into running, it's a good idea to try a free fitness tracker app on your phone. Runkeeper, Map My Run, and Nike+ Run Club are just a few of the many apps that are available for free on your smartphone. These fitness trackers or running apps can track your time, speed, distance, and calories burned. Apple Watches and other smart watches also have fitness trackers with multiple workout settings. You can track your progress, meet your goals, and motivate yourself to beat your own records. Your only competition is yourself!

Ready, Set, Go!

Now that you have all of your gear, you are ready to go! Running is a great way to relax after a long day of work, or a great way to get yourself pumped for the day if you choose to run in the morning. The benefits of living a healthy lifestyle are rewarding, both immediately and in the future. Good luck on your journey!