

# Slow Running

I love running. I'm back to it despite hip surgery. When I thought I'd never be able to run again, I cried. When we were told that surgery could make it possible for me to run again, I had to think for a long time about whether major surgery and up to a year of recovery time, with, of course, possible complications, was worth getting rid of pain and moving freely again. The final decision was not just about running; it was also about not living with constant pain. Running was a part of it, though.

I'm running again. I've never been fast, but I'm more comfortable with being slow this time. I'm running at a pace that doesn't hurt me. I'm still doing intervals, so I don't know where my pace will settle out. I was running at four miles per hour last time, though, so I'm sure I'll get back to that, if nothing else. My cadence is settling at 180 steps per minute, my breathing is okay, I'm doing core and strength work, and when I'm done with a run, I feel tired and centered. I'm still a little worried that my hip will break, but every run that I come back from without pain lets that fear back off a bit.

Being slow does not mean I'm not a runner. It just means I'm a slow runner. I run three days a week and cross train with strength and core work two more days. I'm working my way back to a half marathon. I know myself well enough to need a goal, so I have picked one and signed up for it. Next February I'll be running the second half marathon of my life. I won't be fast, though I expect to be faster than I was when I ran the last one. I expect to be neither first nor last and I'm discovering that I'm quite happy, in this particular area of my life, to be in the middle of the pack, probably somewhere near the back.

I am a perfectionist. I'm learning to curb the tendency, but

it still rears its ugly little head on a regular basis. Running helps. I know I won't be fast. I have short, stubby little legs, but they're strong legs and, once I'm comfortable with running without intervals again, I can keep going. While we were growing up, my dad compared me to a Clydesdale at one point because I just kept chugging along. I was never fast (and, to be honest, when I was younger I really didn't like running at all) but once I have a reasonable level of fitness, I can just keep going. I have decided that I am happy, finally, with not being fast, but being steady. Stubbornness has always been one of my stronger traits, and now I am applying that to running. I don't have to be perfect. I just have to be myself, a runner, though not a fast one. I run. It makes me happier. It calms my brain. It eases my stress. It settles my anxieties. In running, I have found one of the very few places in my life where my body can work hard and my brain can stop niggling at everything. If I start worrying at a problem, I count my cadence as long as I can. By the time I've counted for a while, I've forgotten what was worrying me.

As far as I can tell, except possibly at the elite levels, other runners really don't care how fast I'm going. They're kind. We're all part of a group of people who are just a tiny bit nuts. We go out and run in weird, uncomfortable weather. We push harder than we should sometimes. No matter how slow or fast, we know that bad days will be made better if we can just get a run in there somehow. I've run in races, slowly, and never had anyone say anything unkind. On the contrary, I get cheered on, all of us do, almost as much as the first runner. Sometimes more, actually, since the people ahead wait at the finish line to yell encouragement.

My run on Tuesday was immediately after a very windy night. I spent some of it jumping over downed tree branches and stepping on twigs. It was a very odd experience in the dark of 5 AM. It was a good run, which is defined as one that doesn't leave me hurting afterwards, and the rest of the day,

stressful as it was, went much more smoothly because of that run. Sometimes I struggle, especially when I run with other people who are much faster than I am. My approach to life is drastically better when I run, though, so even if I will always be a slow runner, I am a runner.