

SAFTETY TIPS FOR JOGGERS

Every jogger has his or her favorite route like the path that winds around the park or next to the lake. And the regular runner also knows where that path curves into the shadows or passes a desolate patch of space. Female runners in particular know when to be extra alert and when to take a detour. But take her out of her familiar habitat and regular running routines come to a screeching halt. Business and pleasure trips in strange towns mean unfamiliar paths, and many females feel forced to run in ill-equipped hotel gyms or sacrifice the daily run altogether. Despite a temporary change of venue, though, many women can maintain their daily jogging routine by using common sense safety tips.

Before taking that first morning jog, ask the hotel's front desk staff about the safety of the surrounding area during the hours that you plan to run. General questions such as "Is this neighborhood safe for a quick jog?" will yield you the standard nod from the receptionist who probably lives in a completely different city. Instead ask if she knows of many hotel patrons jogging the nearby streets. Inquire as to whether there are specific spots you should avoid -- Should I detour around this certain park? Or such-and-such a street before sunset? The specificity might prompt the hotel staff to pass along more information than they would otherwise.

Now that you have it on moderately good authority that the streets are not crawling with muggers, you are ready for your first run. Don't let your defenses down just yet, however. For your entire run you should always stay on the main streets where there are plenty of cars and pedestrians. Possible witnesses deter many attackers. Constantly scan your surroundings. Who is in front of you and to your sides? Do you hear someone close behind? Law enforcement agents advise women to consider every face a potential threat. This doesn't mean you should aggressively stare-down the old woman crossing the street, but that smiling, well-dressed man could be the one to pull you off into the nearest alley. Always be prepared for the worst.

Many avid runners prefer not to weigh themselves down and run with only a key and ID shoved in their sock. Females running in unfamiliar territory might feel more comfortable with a light, defensive weapon. Spray bottles of mace can be gripped in the palm. A lightweight horsewhip is also ideal. The short stick with a leather tongue at the end wouldn't do any serious damage, but could be useful for a quick escape. If obvious weapons seem too obsessive, hold the end of one of your keys between your fingers. If an attacker tried to grab you, stab the point aiming for sensitive areas such as the throat or the eyes. Again, the key will hardly damage the attacker for life, but it is not his life you are concerned about. The sudden jolt from any of these weapons would be enough to surprise the aggressor and allow you a safe get away.

As though you didn't have enough to pay attention to already, don't forget to keep track of where you are going. One unfamiliar street can look much like the next and you'll forget if it was 22nd or 23rd Street that you crossed. Keep an eye out for recognizable landmarks, or duck into a bustling shop to ask for directions. Also do not run yourself out of breath. On your own turf, running to exhaustion might be fine, but can be dangerous away from home. Even if you are doing a round trip, you'll want a little extra wind to pick up the pace if you suspect your being followed.

In general, personal safety for women runners in strange cities requires a hunted vs. the hunter attitude -- a constant alertness for the lion crouched in the shadows. Many women find the stress of survival anti-productive to what is supposed to be a leisurely run and, in turn, opt for the gym. But for those avid female runners who can't possibly take the sterile treadmill, following smart safety tips will literally keep you on your toes.

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