**Where Should I Run?**

**Consider these pros and cons before you decide where to work out**

Running builds bone and muscle strength. In order to prevent injury—and burnout—it’s a good idea to map out a few safe, scenic, and traffic-free routes that you feel comfortable on in various weather conditions and different times of day. But what’s best—treadmill, track, sidewalks, grass, or trails? Here’s a quick primer on the pros and cons of [different running surfaces](http://www.runnersworld.com/running-tips/ground-forces).

**Asphalt Roads:** Sidewalks are your best option; after all, they’re made for foot traffic. But in many areas, they just don’t exist. If you have to hit the asphalt, be sure to pick safe, flat, traffic-free stretches that have plenty of space on the shoulder so that you can step to the side to avoid oncoming traffic.  Always run facing traffic. It's easier to see oncoming cars, and cars will see you); wear bright or reflective attire (especially at night or at dusk); and avoid using iPods or wearing headphones (better to hear approaching vehicles). If you are going to run with headphones, run with only one ear bud in; you want to make sure that you can still hear outside noises, such as the sound of an approaching vehicle. Assume that drivers do not see you; be sure to wave to them as they come towards you and give a wave of thanks if they let you pass.  Allow at least three feet between you and the passing vehicle. If you’re running with someone else on the road, go single file when cars need to pass. Run with proper ID and carry a cell phone with emergency contacts taped to its back.

**Trails:** This softer surface can be great if you’ve struggled with overuse injuries like runner’s knee, iliotibial-band syndrome (ITBS), or shin splints. Just be wary of "technical" trails with lots of roots, rocks, and uneven ground that cause your feet to land at an angle. Avoid trails if you’ve ever had an ankle sprain. The ligaments of that joint never recover 100 percent. That increases your risk of a repeat sprain, which is more likely to occur on soft, uneven surfaces. Look for trails that are identified as dirt, asphalt, or even paved Rails-to-Trails routes.

**Sand:** It’s best to stay away from sand unless it’s hard-packed. It’s unstable and can twist the knee, ankle, and hip. If you do run on sand, keep it short. Avoid sand altogether if you have a history of ankle sprains or Achilles tendinitis.

**Track:** While tracks may bring up bad memories of grade-school gym class, they can be an ideal place to start running outside. They’re flat and traffic-free, and the distance is measured. You don’t have to worry about dodging roots, curbs, or aggressive motorists. Many schools open their tracks to the public when they’re not in use. Call ahead to ask.

**Grass:** Grass is a great alternative if you’re just getting back into walking or running following a fracture. On grass, the bulk of the energy from your footfall goes into the ground instead of reverberating back up your leg. If you’re prone to plantar fasciitis, tread carefully. You’re more likely to [over pronate](http://www.runnersworld.com/tag/pronation) on this soft, uneven surface, which puts extra torque on the plantar fascia ligament that runs along the bottom of your foot.

**Treadmill:** The belt’s cushioned surface reduces stress to your back, hips, knees, and feet. And it’s clear of obstacles, like uneven terrain, rocks, and traffic. It's also warm and dry, no matter what the weather. Find a gym nearby with treadmills and hours that fit your schedule. Before you sign up, find out when the prime times are so you can steer clear and be sure to get a free treadmill. Treadmills aren’t ideal because the belt keeps you on pace even when your energy fades. So be sure to do some workouts outside.