OBSTACLE RACE
TRAINING

the **ultimate** guide to **obstacle training**
for your next adventure

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ABOUT AUTHOR

Jason Fitzgerald beat out nearly 17,000 people in the Warrior Dash obstacle race in southeastern Maryland.

If you want to learn how to dominate an obstacle race there's no better person to chat with. This guy is a beast.

ABOUT NERVE RUSH

Nerve Rush gathers the most gut-wrenching and thrill-seeking content on the Internet superhighway. We interview extreme athletes and document endurance & obstacle races.

We also put together a series of gut-wrenching guides for the adventure community.

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Meet Jason – He Won the Warrior Dash

Hey, I'm Jason! I'm one of the authors of this guide and a lifelong runner. My goal is to help you dominate your next obstacle race.

Let's start with my background so you know where I'm coming from. I started running cross country during my freshman year in high school and then went on to run indoor and outdoor track for four years. I actually hated running in middle school but I grew to love it quickly when I started seeing progress during cross country. It's addictive!

I was elected co-captain of the cross country team for my senior year and was All-Conference for two years in a row. I tried a little bit of everything during high school, running the 200m (26.2) to the 2-mile (10:27).

After I graduated, I ran varsity cross country and track at Connecticut College, racing everything from the 400m to 8k cross country. I was mostly a distance runner though, focusing on the indoor 3,000 (with a lifetime best of 9:04) and 8k cross country (my best is 26:19).

Enter Jason Fitzgerald

My affinity for obstacle races started early when I debuted with a win in the 3,000m Steeplechase. The steeple is an outdoor track race that has five three-foot tall barriers (they're not hurdles - they don't fall if you hit them, you do) per lap, including one with a water pit right after the barrier!

I loved the steeple and in only my second race ever, went on to be a Top Ten finisher in New England. My time of 9:57.32 is still #8 on Connecticut College's all-time list.

After I graduated I got into sprint triathlons for a summer but realized I was a terrible swimmer (I sink like a rock!). So I recommitted myself to running and ran a few new races: 10k cross country, 10 miles, and the half marathon.

Then in 2008 I ran 2:44 in the New York Marathon but for six months afterward I suffered with IT Band Syndrome. After seeing four physical therapists and doing a lot of research, I finally got healthy.

That experienced inspired me to start Strength Running, a site for passionate distance runners who want to run faster, beat injuries, and improve their training. You'll find the same training strategies that I use with my runners in the workouts in this guide.

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Enter Jason Fitzgerald

My new training philosophy has me running more than ever and I haven't had a serious running injury in over three years. I even improved my marathon time by over five minutes to 2:39 at the Philadelphia Marathon.

You'll see here that the training is focused on being a well-rounded athlete. Obstacle races are primarily running events, but it's only part of the puzzle and there are a lot of other types of training that can help you dominate.

In 2012 I ran my first true obstacle race - a Warrior Dash - and beat nearly 17,000 other competitors by over a minute. It was beyond fun: challenging, unique, and exciting (plus you get free beer after the race!).

The funny part of that race is that I never went in hoping to win. My training had prepared me incredibly well and it was a quick decision to go for the win about a half-mile into the race. I hope you'll have the same experience.

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Enter Jason Fitzgerald

My goal with this guide is to give you several advantages over your competitors so you'll run faster, be quicker (and safer) over the obstacles, and ultimately have the time of your life in your next obstacle race.

Once you do the training, you'll be ready to crush it.

Obstacle Race Training

Why it is Different than Running

Every obstacle course race - Warrior Dash, Spartan Race, Tough Mudder and others - is similar in that they involve mostly running on uneven trails and grass. You'll also be climbing, jumping, and crawling over regular obstacles that are meant to slow you down and put you into oxygen debt quickly (ever try to run fast after pulling your body weight up a rope? It's tough).

There are only a few races like the Men's Health Urbanathlon that are held on the road. The training won't change much for these races though - in fact, training on trails will put you in an even better position for a more urban race.

Since most of these races present the same challenges, obstacles, and terrain, there are a few universal truths to doing well on race day.

Obstacle Race Training

6 Universal Truths

➢ Don't wear loose shorts, shirt, or extra layers. You'll get weighed down in the mud pit, get it caught in the barbed wire, or have to carry extra weight when you get soaked with water.

➢ Assume every obstacle is wet and slippery, especially if you're not in the first wave of runners.

➢ Make sure your shoes are tied well or they could pop off in the mud pit.

➢ All of your clothes will likely be permanently stained, muddy, or smelly. Wear stuff you don't like.

➢ Try to start at the front of the race to avoid bottlenecks at the obstacles.

➢ Don't rush over the obstacles (see tip #2 above). Falling off a 10-foot barrier is worse than taking an extra five seconds to ensure your safety.

Each race also has its unique challenges, so slightly altering your training will help you compete at your best on race day.

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Obstacle Race Training

Obstacle Race Mentality

What's most important for doing well in an obstacle race is your mentality. You're not out running a 5k or 10k on the roads. You're scrambling through mud, running away from zombies, leaping over flames, or climbing on rope ladders that all present very real dangers to your safety (especially those zombies).

You have to be mentally tough to complete an obstacle race. There will be challenges and having the mindset to do well on race day is critical.

Changing your mindset is the real key to success in any obstacle race. Keep these in mind before you race:

➢ **Obstacles pose safety risks so you can't zone out like in other races**. Stay focused, vigilant, and extra mindful of everything you're doing on the course.

➢ **Running speed between the obstacles will be much slower than a distance without them**. Acknowledge the slowdown, accept it, and focus on doing the best you can.

➢ **Have fun**. It sounds silly, but runners who fear the course (with no reason) don't do as well as those runners who embrace the challenge.

➢ **Stay calm**. Find your CHI and avoid an anxiety attack. I've seen it – not pretty.

Obstacle Race Training

How to Train for a Short Course Race (like Warrior Dash)

Short course races are typically about 3-4 miles long and have up to 20 obstacles. They come quickly and often, so you need to be focused on race day.

Luckily, training for a short obstacle race like Warrior Dash won't require much more time and effort than a 5k - 10k race. The obstacles can be challenging, but they're designed so that people in average shape can complete them. That means you don't need too much preparation to be ready for them.

There's one training principle for obstacle races that most athletes either dismiss or don't realize: these races are mostly running - you don't need to be a gymnast or CrossFit champion to excel at them. They don't require superhuman strength, agility, or toughness.

From a training perspective, that means the majority of your training is going to be running. While it's helpful to get familiar with some of the obstacles you're going to be facing, you don't need the strength to be able to do handstand push ups or the agility to do 5 backflips in a row. But you do need the stamina to run fast between every obstacle!

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That's why most of your training will look similar to 5k or 10k training. We want to develop your endurance - obstacle fitness is the icing on the cake and it comes gradually through the strength and flexibility drills you're doing throughout the training plan.

Short course training will include several things that are important to getting you ready to finish your race well. First, you'll be doing a weekly moderate long run. Of course, you don't need a really long run to do well in a race like Warrior Dash, so it will be sensible. No 20 milers here! But the running-specific endurance you develop from running longer than the race distance is critical. Plus running long helps improve your running economy (or, efficiency), so you'll become a faster runner just by using less energy to run.

The next ingredient in your training is a healthy dose of strength exercises to keep you injury-free and strong enough to complete the obstacles. While a gym can be helpful, you don't even need one. Body-weight strength work is all you need. After all, the obstacles you'll be facing require you to jump, crawl, pull yourself up, and climb - you won't be using any additional weight other than your own body.

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Finally, you'll be doing speed workouts to help you run faster on race day. These workouts will often be multiple-pace workouts, meaning they'll include a variety of paces to get you used to transitioning from crawling to running during the obstacle race. You'll see tempo runs, traditional interval workouts on the track (you can do a fartlek if you don't have access to a track), and hill repetitions. Each workout in this guide is designed with one goal in mind: help you run fast on race day.

Specificity is also crucial. All this means is that what you do during training needs to be specific to the race itself. You'll see two workouts in this training guide that adhere to this principle.

First, since the terrain of almost every obstacle race is trails or uneven grass, we highly recommend that you do several of your weekly training runs on a similar surface. This might not be possible for you but if you can find a good trail you'll have a distinct advantage over those runners who have only trained on the roads.

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Second, there are several circuit workouts that combine hard running with body weight exercises. These workouts are designed to mimic the demands of the race itself: the stopping and starting of hard running combined with strength-oriented obstacles. You won't need any equipment to complete these workouts - just a willingness to work hard.

When you go through a short-course training plan, you'll be far more ready for a race like Warrior Dash than most of your competitors. We think you're going to surprise yourself on race day at how well you'll finish.

Obstacle Race Training

How to Train for a Long Course Race (like Tough Mudder)

Long course races present challenges that you just won't find in a shorter race like Warrior Dash. First and foremost is the sheer distance of these races - most Tough Mudders are 10-12 miles long! And the obstacles are more difficult (most people can't finish without the help of others).

Because of the distance of these races, you'll be running significantly more mileage per week to get your body ready for such a long course. You don't necessarily have to run the entire long-course race, but our goal is to prepare you so that if you want to, you can do so easily.

Long-course races are tough - there's no way to sugarcoat it. Most people with a few weeks of training can complete a Warrior Dash but that's not true of a Tough Mudder. If you're not prepared, you likely won't even make it to the finish line.

In fact, the Tough Mudder bills itself as "probably the toughest event on the planet" and the obstacles are designed by British Special Forces. They're harder than those in Warrior Dash and you may need a partner to help you complete them.

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With slippery monkey bars, log carrying exercises, and very high walls to climb over you're going to be physically pushed to the max on race day. That's why your training needs to get kicked up a notch. **We ask more of our long-course athletes because the demands of the race are more difficult.**

Here's what you can expect if you're training for an event like Tough Mudder. Most importantly, the long runs will be longer (in fact, they'll be longer than the race itself). With a race distance in the double digits, combined with multiple obstacles, you'll likely be on the course for two hours or more. Increasing your endurance to a level that will keep fatigue at bay is our #1 goal.

The fast workouts will be longer (but slower) to prepare you for the distance and demands of a long race. Instead of sprint workouts and fast intervals, you're going to be focusing on tempo runs and circuit workouts that target your aerobic fitness. Endurance is your main priority; you're going to need it for a Tough Mudder.

You'll also be doing more intense strength workouts than the short-course training. We recommend that you have access to a gym (or if that's not possible for you, a playground) so you can do more advanced body weight exercises like pull ups and chin ups. The circuit workouts that you'll be doing will also be longer and more focused on building strength. Consider them a dress rehearsal for the big day.

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Like with shorter races, trail running will play an important role in your race prep. Tough Mudders are notorious for mud so you need to experience and get comfortable with running on muddy, uneven, and wet trails that force you to be super aware of your footing. We'll go into more specifics on the non-running aspects of training in the obstacle section below.

Most people with some basic training can finish a Tough Mudder. Our goal is to help you finish stronger than other people and give you the confidence to tackle a long-course obstacle race without feeling overwhelmed.

If you do the training, you'll be primed to dominate all 10+ miles.

Obstacle Race Training

Obstacle-Specific Training

Do you have access to a mud pit, barbed wire, 20-foot high stacks of haybales, or a few dozen monster truck tires?

We didn't think so. Unless you're kind of crazy, of course.

It's a practical impossibility to practice on the types of obstacles that you'll encounter during the race. Nobody is going to hang electrified wires in their backyard or chop down 15 trees to make a climbing wall (if you do, please let us know!).

Luckily, training on race obstacles isn't required to run well on race day. Nobody has that advantage except for those who have done the race before. All you need is the strength to complete them, coupled with the endurance to keep going at it for a few hours.

Preparing for the obstacles will include three key components:

➢ Strength and flexibility exercises

➢ Trail running

➢ Circuit workouts that combine strength work with running

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Let's talk about why each one is so important to your preparation.

Strength and flexibility exercises are going to make you a more well-rounded, holistic athlete than someone who is just a runner. If you can't do a round of push ups, a few planks, and some pull ups then you're in trouble (especially if you're training for a long-course race).

You're going to need the strength to pull yourself over walls, push yourself up off the ground, and climb up rope ladders. Not only will the strength exercises in our training plans help you finish better on race day, but they'll help you stay healthy during your training and more resistant to running injuries.

Trail running is another important aspect of getting ready for the rigors of an obstacle race. While it's not 100% necessary - and some races like the Men's Health Urbanathlon aren't on trails - trail running is hugely beneficial.

It will make you more comfortable on uneven terrain, improve your agility as you quick step over rocks and roots, and make you less susceptible to injuries as you develop better balance and work stability muscles you don't typically use when you run on the roads.

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Trails also often have frequent turns and elevation changes - just what you're going to encounter during your obstacle race. We don't recommend that you transition all of your running to the trails - dancing over uneven terrain requires more agility than road running and you need to gradually get your body prepared for that. Starting on some easy trails and slowly running more technical trails is a better strategy.

You'll notice that there are no specific trail runs listed on the training plans. This is by design - not everyone will have access to them and we don't believe they're a necessity (though, they're really helpful).

Instead, we recommend choosing one easy run per week to do on trails if you have them nearby. Use whatever is available: a national or state park, dirt walking trail, grass fields, or even crushed cinder walking paths that wind around turns and have slight elevation changes.

Circuit workouts combine the two most important elements of your training: running and strength exercises. These sessions will closely mimic what you need to do on race day: run, obstacle, run, obstacle, repeat.

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They're crucial because they teach your body to perform different movements when you're already tired. Push, pull, run, climb, run, crawl, push, run, pull, jump, run. It's exhausting but damn effective!

A circuit works by having you run for a certain period of time (or distance) at a certain pace. Then you stop and complete a series of exercises to approximate the demands of an obstacle before you keep running. This pattern is repeated several times depending on your fitness level and the type of race you're training to complete.

Obstacle Race Training

How to Use Your Training Plan

All of us have different schedules and preferences for how we run our weekly workouts. No matter our differences, there are several principles that you should use to structure your week for the best chance of success in your obstacle race.

These training rules will help you recover well from your faster sessions and long runs while ensuring you're still doing the right workouts to finish your race strong.

Rule #1: Never schedule a long run and a fast workout (or circuit workout) on back to back days. Both of these sessions are high-effort and will put a lot of stress on your body. Make sure you take at least one day of easy running – or a day off – in between these two types of workouts. You want to make sure you're allowing yourself enough recovery.

Rule #2: Always do your warm-up routine but if you need to save time then cut your post-run routine short. Your pre-run flexibility routine helps prepare you for your run and warms up your muscles, helping you prevent injuries and maximize your performance.

If time is short, you can skip your core or strength workout that's scheduled after your run but try to fit it in later in the day. Just 5-10 minutes can help you prevent injuries.

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Rule #3: Prioritize your most important runs. Your most valuable workouts (in order) are your circuit workout, long run, fast workout (if you have a second workout during the week), and finally your easy/short recovery runs. If you must skip a run, then you can skip an easy short run.

Rule #4: Consistency is king. Choose when you'll run your fast workout and long run – and then try your best to stick to that schedule for the remainder of the training cycle. That will make it easier to get in these key workouts while keeping the rest of your week flexible to do your easy recovery runs.

Rule #5: Do your strength workout after an easy run. We want you to prioritize your hard days but also your easy days - including the days you're not running at all. You could space things out and do your strength session on a day you're not running, but that could mean you're not taking any days off completely.

It's important to ensure you're well recovered from those high-quality days so we want to encourage you to combine an easy run with a strength workout. This will leave you with 1-2 easy runs (and no strength workouts) and 1-2 days completely off from exercise depending on your training plan. Enjoy yourself on these off days and prioritize full recovery by getting a lot of rest.

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You may also be wondering what to do if you don't have a track to run your workouts. The Circuit Workouts are measured in meters from 300m to 800m depending on the length of the race you're training for and your current fitness level.

Here's a useful chart to convert meters to time so you can do these workouts anywhere:

METERS	TIME
300m	1:00
400m	1:30
600m	2:30
800m	3:30

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No training plan is executed perfectly but remember that it's more important what you do most of the time than what you do once in a while. A skipped workout or long run once or twice in a training cycle is fine – as long as it's rare. Don't let perfection become your obsession.

If you're not sure whether to choose the Beginner or Advanced training plan for your race distance, my suggestion is to be conservative and choose the Beginner option. Flexibility is built into each plan so you'll have the ability to increase the mileage of your maintenance runs (those runs that aren't a fast workout or long run) to increase the plan's difficulty.

Then when you're ready to take your training up a level for your next obstacle race, you can graduate to the Advanced training plan with longer workouts and more mileage.

Remember to take a long-term perspective with your training: it's often best to do slightly less than you think you can handle to make sure you don't over train or set yourself up for an overuse injury.

Consistency over time is much more important than brief periods of higher mileage workouts.

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Gear & Apparel Recommendations

The beauty of running - including obstacle races - is that you don't need much gear to be successful. If you're a true minimalist, a good pair of shoes, shorts, and a t-shirt is all you need to be successful.

We're big fans of minimalism - or doing what you need to do with the least amount of gear, distractions, and stress. But we also know that certain pieces of gear and apparel can enhance your workouts and give you valuable data that you can use to inform your training.

That's why we've compiled our favorite pieces of training gear and gadgets from what's available on the market. You don't need everything on this list, but pick and choose what works for you.

Heart Rate Monitor (HRM): This gadget is comprised of a strap that goes around your chest and a regular looking watch. The strap measures your heart rate and communicates that data to your watch so you can track it during your workout.

Many HRM's have useful functionality that enables you to set a heart rate zone and then the watch will beep if you are outside of this zone. It will also measure your lowest, max, and average heart rate for the duration of the workout.

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HRM's are useful for particular workouts, especially easy runs (to make sure you don't go too fast) and tempo runs (to make sure your heart rate stays in the correct range).

Running Shoes: This one's a no brainer! There are obviously hundreds - if not thousands - of shoes you can choose from for training and the race itself. Our advice is to simply choose what you're most comfortable with and what feels best on your foot.

There's been a lot of hype about "barefoot running shoes" like Vibram FiveFingers, New Balance Minimus, or Merrell Trail Glove. These shoes are useful tools to help you develop a more economical stride, improve your foot and lower leg strength, and ultimately make you more resilient to injuries. But they're not a panacea.

In fact, if you're not used to these highly minimalist running shoes, then we don't recommend you jump into wearing them for 100% of your running. Instead, try a neutral trainer like the ASICS Speedstars, Adidas adiZero Boston, or the Saucony Kinvara.

GPS Watch (Garmin): The cost of GPS watches has come down recently, making them more accessible to runners. Most importantly, they allow you to track distance and pace so you know how far and fast you're going.

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Depending on satellite coverage, terrain, tree coverage, and elevation changes these watches obviously aren't 100% accurate but they can give you a good estimate of how well you're running.

Wrightsocks: What runner hasn't gotten a blister? Fortunately, sock technology has improved dramatically over the last 20 years so you don't need to wear cotton tube socks like your Dad. Instead, we highly recommend Wrightsocks.

Wrightsocks are a synthetic polyester fabric that wicks sweat away from your skin so you won't get soggy feet during a particularly long or hot run. But most importantly, they actually have two layers of fabric so if there is any rubbing, it takes place between the layers of the sock - rather than against your skin.

Running shorts: We know they're short. And there's that weird liner in them (so you don't have to wear underwear). But running shorts are built that way for a reason: they enhance your performance when you're out running.

Mesh shorts or polyester soccer shorts require you to wear underwear, which is only going to increase your risk of chafing. Plus, running shorts are short so that you won't get bogged down by heavy mesh around your knees.

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When you're crawling through mud or high-stepping through rubber tires, you'll be grateful that you have a good pair of running shorts that let you move adequately.

Performance Singlet: This isn't a necessity but it's a "nice-to-have," especially if you're working out in hot conditions. A singlet is like a tank top except it's cut a little differently to help reduce your chafing risk. If you've ever seen a professional runner racing on the roads or track, he was wearing a singlet.

Not only will you get less chafing with a singlet, but the fabric is usually polyester which wicks sweat off your skin and stays relatively dry. It also has less fabric - so you'll be carrying less weight around when you get soaked with water or mud during your race.

Camelbak: You'll only need one of these backback hydration systems if you're doing a particularly long race like the Tough Mudder, which typically take over three hours, and need to replace fluids along the way.

These are basically water bottles in the shape of backpacks that have a straw coming out of the top of the bag. You can easily sip your fluids as you're running, perfect for those who hate carrying things in their hands.

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Foam Roller: Massage is expensive. A foam roller lets you easily do some self-massage for less than twenty bucks in your own living room.

These are highly recommended for everyone so you can work out any tight areas, muscle adhesions, or potential scar tissue that you might have from previous injuries or tough workouts.

They're easy to use, affordable, and very effective.

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Nutrition (Pre-Race and In-Race Fueling)

First, let's talk briefly about nutrition and diet in general. We don't believe in "traditional diets" - unsustainable cuts in calories, dramatic changes in eating habits, and refusing anything that's considered unhealthy. It's not very rewarding nor is it the best long-term solution for happiness, weight management, or optimal health.

Rather than crash diets, it's best to change your mindset about food. Instead of "healthy" vs. "unhealthy" it's best to think of specific foods as sitting on a spectrum of good health. And the best thing you can do is eat real food.

This just means minimally processed with as few ingredients as possible, like high-quality meat, vegetables, fruit, nuts, beans, wild rice and quinoa. This is the stuff that nourishes our bodies and creates vibrant health.

In addition to eating "real" food, the second most important food rule to live by is to cut back on your sugar intake. Unfortunately, sugar is in everything from barbecue sauce and soda to salad dressing. It's everywhere.

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Of course, as a runner training for a race you need to be realistic about your carbohydrate levels so eat quality sources of carbs like yams, wild rice, fruit, quinoa, whole grain spaghetti (if gluten isn't an issue for you), and oatmeal.

But on a day to day level there's no need to constantly be carb-loading with empty sources of calories like bagels, muffins, sugary cereal, juice from concentrate, and granola bars. Save that for when you've just completed your race (you deserve it!), a really tough running workout, or long run.

Pre-Race Fueling
So what's the best meal to have before you race? This is deeply personal and depends on what your stomach can handle, your previous eating habits during training, and how long your race is.

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Let's go over a few best practices:

➢ Eat at least 2-4 hours before your race to allow some digestion.

➢ Choose easy to digest foods like toast, oatmeal, bananas, or an energy bar.

➢ Avoid foods very high in fat or protein since they digest more slowly and could leave you with an upset stomach on the starting line.

➢ Eat more (and more carbohydrates) for a longer race like Tough Mudder. You don't need to go overboard on fueling with carbs for a short race like Warrior Dash.

The best way to determine a good meal before your race is to experiment during training. We recommend that you choose 2-3 breakfast options and try them before a hard workout or long run to see how your body responds. You'll never know without experimenting.

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After 20+ years of combined racing experience, we have found certain breakfasts to work well to prepare you for a race. Here are several recommendations:

➢ [light breakfast for short races or those with a sensitive stomach] Banana with a tablespoon of peanut butter (or other nut butter)

➢ [average breakfast for short races if you can handle it or slightly longer races] Oatmeal with honey and one scrambled egg

➢ [high calorie breakfast for long races] Oatmeal with honey, energy bar, one scrambled egg

These breakfast options are in the 200 - 600 calorie range depending on portion sizes and provide plenty of carbs to fuel your run. Race day is one of the few times when you can go really wild with carbohydrates to maximize performance and recovery.

In-Race Fueling

Fueling during the race itself is fortunately a simpler task. Eating whole foods during a race is difficult - plus they're harder to carry with you - so we don't recommend that. A better alternative is to eat something specifically designed for athletes.

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The best options available include gels, energy blocks (both best for shorter races), and bars (for longer races). These are easy to digest so they help reduce the risk of you needing the bathroom halfway through the race. Nobody wants that.

Plus, these fuel sources are portable and you can easily stash them in a pocket, camelbak compartment, or even in your sock.

Even for a long course of up to 12 miles like the Tough Mudder, you won't need too many extra calories as long as you had a good breakfast. For most athletes, the equivalent of 1-3 gels or one energy bar - or 100 to 300 calories - during a 2-4 hour event should be sufficient.

Fluid intake is another important consideration, especially for races longer than 90 minutes. The standard recommendation is to take in 6-8 ounces for every half hour that you're exercising. This is a little extreme - if you start the race hydrated then you should only need 2-3 cups of water or electrolyte drink (like Gatorade) for a 2-4 hour event.

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New research casts doubts on the conventional wisdom that "any dehydration will negatively impact your performance." In fact, one study showed that the fastest marathoners were also the most dehydrated. As long as you start hydrated and prioritize hydration after your race you'll be just fine.

Even more interesting, over-hydration can be even more dangerous than dehydration. Don't think you need to drink liters of water during a race - you don't.

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Hacking the Course

If you're a Type-A runner and want to go above and beyond normal training, you can do more research to get an advantage on race day. These strategies are certainly not necessary but they may help you understand the course more completely and better mentally prepare you for what you'll be facing on race day.

Study the race website. Ever race should have a website with a ton of information available that you can use to learn more about the race, amenities, and the venue itself.

Let's look at Warrior Dash as a good example. Each of their races has the course laid out with expected obstacles (they never tell you exactly which obstacles they'll use for your particular race) online, so you can see the shape of the course. This is valuable because it may start with a significant straight section (meaning it might be a fast start) or a lot of turns (a slow start).

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Here are a few other things to look for when researching the race website:

➢ **Parking** - is it far away from the race itself? Is there room for you to do your warm-up routine without getting hit by a car (safety first!)? Can you run straight from your car to the starting line?

➢ **Bathrooms** - How many are being provided and how many athletes are participating in the race? Where are they located? Planning this part of your day could mean the difference between success and failure!

➢ **Amenities** - does the race provide water/food before, during, and after your event? Are there places to sit and hang out? How will you be able to wash mud, blood, tears, and the stench of victory from your filthy body after the race?

One of the most overlooked ways to research your race is simply talking to others who have already completed it! Find athletes from years past in your circle of friends who did the race at the same location - or talk to people who ran in a prior heat on the day of the race.

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Pick their brains on the most difficult obstacles, the footing of the terrain, unexpected surprises, anything specific to look out for, and their most important piece of advice. Obstacle racers rarely go this in-depth when they scope the course beforehand, which means you're going to get a big advantage!

Feel free to also contact the organizer and ask the same questions before race day. They may be able to tell you more specifics about the obstacles, terrain, and the type of course that they're planning. You should also inquire about the exact distance since obstacle races are notorious for being longer or shorter than advertised.

Live close to the race site? Drive out there and have a look yourself! While the course may be closed off to runners or the general public, you may be able to gather some valuable reconnaissance. Of course, we can't encourage you to sneak into any protected areas so remember to be safe!

<u>Race Day</u>

How to Warm-Up and Cool-Down

As an athlete, you know that to perform your best, your body needs to prepare itself to work harder. You wouldn't jump out of your chair after a day at the office and immediately run a Tough Mudder, would you? We hope not. Cold, stiff muscles are going to make you feel fatigued, flat, and also make you more susceptible to overuse injuries.

Before your race (and your training runs), we recommend a warm-up sequence that should take you about 15-30 minutes depending on your ability level and the race you're about to run.

It's a lot different than you may remember from high school gym class when your teacher told you to stretch before exercise. That was the standard way of doing things for decades.

But now, we know that static stretching (holding a stretch for a certain amount of time) doesn't help you warm up or prevent injuries. In fact, rather than improving your performance, static stretching before exercise can make you perform worse. We won't advise you to do any static stretching.

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Instead, a good warm up sequence includes dynamic stretches that have you move in multiple planes of motion and actually help you warm up. They'll increase your heart rate and open your capillary networks so you'll be that much more ready to start running.

But that's not all dynamic stretches do for you; they also increase your range of motion, lubricate your joints, and safely prepare you to run while lowering your risk of injury. Just a short routine of 5-10 minutes is all you need to feel better, perform at a higher level, and reduce your injury risk.

The same dynamic stretches that you do before you run can also be done after you finish running. These flexibility exercises help you work out the tight spots and imbalances that are created by running. Just watch any elite runner before or after their race and you'll see them doing leg swings, skips, and a host of other dynamic movements. These are the types of stretches you'll be doing before your obstacle race and training runs.

It's important to understand that as you start to run more and get comfortable with covering longer distances (and of course, going faster), you need to develop as an athlete as well. General strength, flexibility, balance, and coordination are incredibly important to do well in an obstacle race - especially the longer races like Tough Mudder.

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That's why your cool-down after your training runs will include bodyweight strength exercises that help you become more athletic, injury resistant, and efficient. You don't need a gym to do these routines; they're all functional exercises that are more specific to running than simple bicep or hamstring curls.

You'll be doing workouts that include lunges, side leg raises, and planks - all of which can be done in your living room. Certain movements are a bit more functional than others, but the variety of exercises that we recommend ensure they correct imbalances, improve general and specific strength, and address any particular weaknesses that you might have.

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The Warm-Up Routine (10 reps for each exercise)

➢ [Lying Leg Raises](#)

➢ [Body Weight Squats](#)

➢ [Skipping High Knees](#)

➢ [Knee Hugs](#)

➢ [Drinking Birds](#)

➢ [Front Leg Swings](#)

➢ [Side Leg Swings](#)

*click each link for a video walkthrough

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The Cool-Down Routine (10 reps for each exercise)

- ➢ [Donkey Kicks](#)
- ➢ [Fire Hydrants](#)
- ➢ [60" Plank](#)
- ➢ [Side Lunges](#)
- ➢ [Body Weight Squats](#)
- ➢ [Front Leg Swings](#)
- ➢ [Side Leg Swings](#)

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