

Ready to Roll

Running on a treadmill has many advantages, especially in winter. Here are the 12 biggest
by Welles Lobb

From Manitoba to Maui and Seattle to St. Pete, more and more runners are training on treadmills. And why not? There's simply no other way to guarantee you get the workout you want in the conditions you want at the time you want. Convenience—it's a major factor in all our time-pressed lives.

So major that surveys indicate close to 40 million Americans run on treadmills. And according to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, treadmills have become the biggest-selling item in the home-fitness category—ahead of bicycles, rowing machines, stairclimbers and cross-country ski machines.

Recently we asked ourselves and a group of Runner's World readers why treadmill training has grown so popular. We got dozens of different responses, but the following 12 were mentioned most often by runners who have made the treadmill a regular and important part of their running programs.

1. Comfort and safety. No extreme heat or cold. No rain, wind, snow or ice. No darkness. No traffic. No mean dogs, wild animals or weirdos. If you say treadmill training removes the spirit of adventure that outdoor running provides, well, yes, it can. However, in the name of safety and comfort, it often pays to heed the call of the great indoors. Even in Canada's remote Yukon Territory, where people have to be as hardy as the native northern vegetation to survive, Cheryl Klippert runs on a treadmill. "I'm afraid to venture too far on the roads because of bears, but I can still enjoy the view by setting up my treadmill outdoors," says Klippert. Suburbia presents other safety issues. "When snow piles up on the sides of streets after a snowfall, I don't think it's fair for drivers to have to share the road with a runner," says Greg Dunston of Rockville, Md. "I run inside on my treadmill." Fact: With [safety being an especially big concern for women](#), it's not surprising that a survey conducted by research firm American Sports Data found that more than 70 percent of new home-treadmill buyers in the United States are female.

2. The best place to work on improved [running form](#). Combine the steady roll of the treadmill belt with the controlled indoor environment, and you've got the perfect setting to work on your running form. By observing her treadmill reflection in a mirror, Andrea Gardenhire of La Mesa, Calif., has corrected flaws in her foot placement, arm swing and breathing patterns. "The small adjustments I make on the treadmill help me later on the road," she says. Tip: If you've got access to a VCR, pop in a videotape from the Boston Marathon or New York City Marathon, and emulate the fluid running styles of the fast runners.

3. Guilt-free TV time. Okay, so you can't match the Kenyans. You can still use the TV to improve your running. Pick whatever show you just can't bear to miss—from a sports event to Oprah to Ally McBeal—and let it transport you through a mindless training run. Remember: Every workout is a good workout, even if it doesn't move you any closer to the Olympics. Best of all, if you log 30 or 60 minutes of treadmill time, you don't have to feel guilty about turning on the tube.

4. A smooth transition to running. Exercising on a treadmill may be the easiest, most natural way to make the transition from walking to running. Why? Because as you walk faster and faster (and see the calorie-burning number increase on your display console), you begin to realize that you'll burn even more calories if you go faster. "I'd been a walker for years, and never intended to become a runner," says Kathy Boyce. Then the Elizabeth City, N.C., woman bought a treadmill and was up to 4 miles of running after three months on the treadmill. "Now I can hardly break a sweat when I walk. It's not the same as running."

5. A range of customized workouts. Advanced treadmills come with built-in training programs that, with the push of a few buttons, operate on automatic pilot during a workout. Many "mills" also come with additional computer capacity to allow you to set up several customized workouts. "I think of my treadmill not as a machine, but as a personal coach," says Paul Stofko of Schereville, Ind. "By programming it, I force myself to run a certain speed, time and distance, even when I don't feel up to it." Tip: Have your treadmill dealer instruct you and then thoroughly read your owner's manual before you plunge into the fascinating but technical world of custom workouts.

6. Excellent heart-rate monitoring. Built-in heart-rate functions are standard equipment on many high-quality home treadmills, and they can make your training more scientific and more effective. Particularly useful: a function by which the treadmill speeds up or slows down in response to your heart rate. "With the help of my pulse meter, I'm able to regulate my

workouts precisely," notes Eric Tobias of Warminster, Pa.

7. Top-notch [injury prevention](#). Good treadmills provide a firm but forgiving ride. That is, they're easier on the legs than concrete and asphalt. Indeed, some makers of low-impact treadmills claim a shock reduction of 40 percent compared to running on roads. The treadmill belts themselves are more "giving" than road surfaces, and the treadmill's underpinnings work effectively to disperse shock waves, known as "ground reaction forces," that occur when your foot strikes a surface. "A low-impact treadmill can actually absorb some of the ground reaction forces that would otherwise be directed back into the body," says Seattle-based exercise physiologist Marnie Snyder.

8. Simplified marathon training. We know a world-class marathoner who has logged 30 miles in a single treadmill run and a beginning marathoner who trained for her first marathon with 3-hour run/walk sessions. In between these two extremes are thousands of runners who sometimes find a treadmill safer, friendlier and more motivational than outside running. Johanna Rees of Coronado, Calif., used a treadmill to begin her running program and, just one year later, finished a marathon in 3:43, after doing 95 percent of her training on a treadmill. Tip: If you're planning for a marathon or another race with some daunting hills on the course, you can use your treadmill's incline function to simulate those hills.

9. The ability to quantify workouts. Want to know how many calories you've burned? Your heart rate? How fast you're running? The distance you've run to the hundredth of a mile? Only a treadmill can provide this precise data, and sometimes much more. A treadmill's "feedback" functions provide important training information, as well as motivation and entertainment during workouts. "I am a beginner, and the displays on the treadmill give me 'proof' of how far I've run," notes Heather Seymour of Stamford, Conn.

10. Musical motivation. When you're on a treadmill, you don't have to worry about safety concerns or anyone else's musical tastes. Put on your portable tape or CD player and turn up the volume as high as you like. "Whatever type of music motivates you, let it blast away," suggests Bruce Kushner of Laurys Station, Pa. "As your heartbeat creeps up during a workout, it's easier to concentrate on music than on a passive medium like TV."

11. Incredible workout variety. No road, track or trail has it all. Each is either too flat or too hilly, too hard or too soft. The treadmill has exactly what you want, when you want it. "With a little imagination, you can design treadmill workouts that are more variable and yet more precise than those you do on the road or track," says Owen Anderson, Ph.D., Runner's World's "Fast Lane" columnist.

12. The Zen of treadmill running. Because a treadmill does so much for you, you can relax during your workout and not worry about traffic, potholes, ice, dogs or people yelling at you. Patrick McAndless of Richmond, B.C., says he can put himself into a meditative state by listening to his breathing and focusing on key body parts, from his head to his toes. "Before you know it, you've completed your workout," he notes. Wally Perez is more quantitative about his quiet time. "I exercise before work and use the time on the treadmill to organize my thoughts for the day, personally and professionally," says the Austin, Tex., runner.