Women's Running

July 2016

"When I have a good day and I can just go and run, I feel so lucky!"
- meet our cover star, Kim, p8

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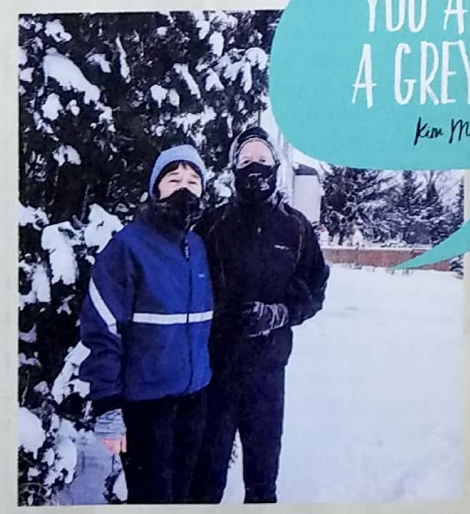
It was a dark and stormy night and my running club was doing speed training: one-mile circuits with a short rest in between. As one of the club's slowest members, I was hating every second of it, especially as running at lung-busting speed meant I couldn't chat to my friend Victoria. Reaching the end of my second mile, almost collapsing, I saw Victoria in the distance, waiting for me to catch up with her. "We LOVE speed training!" exclaimed Victoria loudly. "Yeah, right!" I said through gritted teeth. And then she said it again, with even more enthusiasm. The third time, I joined in, shouting out that ridiculous-sounding mantra with all my might. And just then, something miraculous happened. I felt a surge of energy, the grimace turned into a grin, and when we set off on our next lap I swear we ran it twice as fast as we had the first one.

Such is the power of mantras. I guess I should have remembered to use one before Victoria came up with the idea because, as a clinical hypnotherapist, I frequently teach my clients to use mantras to boost their self-belief. And Victoria and I aren't alone in knowing they really do work: everyone from four-time World Ironman Champion Chrissie Wellington, whose mantra is "Smile!", to 2004 Olympic marathon bronze medallist Deena Kastor, who repeated "Define yourself" on her way to her first marathon victory in Chicago in 2005, knows that they can make the difference between giving in or getting there. Dr Rhonda Cohen, a sport and exercise psychologist at Middlesex University and the author of *Sport Psychology: Optimising Human Performance* (Bloomsbury, £22), is also a big fan.



YOU ARE NOT A GREYHOUND
Kim McCallum

"I strongly believe in mantras as a way to aid performance," she says. "Mantras can be used to stay upbeat during a run: at the start they're a way of energising yourself; during a run they can keep you focused and help maintain positive thoughts, and at the end of a race they can help motivate you to get across the finish line."

Mantras work on many different levels. I encourage my hypnotherapy clients to use them to help banish negative thoughts such as "What if I fail?" with more positive thoughts such as, "I can do this." And according to Cohen, they're also effective because, rather than having various thoughts firing off randomly around your head, they focus your mind. "Depending on the mantras you use, they can either calm you down or excite you," she says. "A focused mantra that keeps you calm (such as 'Head up and body flowing' or 'Believe') will help you maintain a good running pace, while a mantra that excites you (such as 'Go, go, go!') can raise your adrenaline levels, providing you with more energy." However, she cautions, beware of mantras that over-increase adrenaline ("I must be perfect"; "I must win") as this can result in increased muscle tension that can lead to an increased risk of injury.

Mantras are particularly good for distracting yourself from discomfort. Whenever they're chugging up a never-ending incline, I encourage my clients to quote *The Little Engine That Could* by chanting, "I know I can, I know I can!" or, "Beast this hill!" until they reach the top.

Ready to give mantras a go? It's easy to come up with your own. One way is to complete the sentence "I am…" by adding in whatever word you think best describes the way you'd like to feel while running. Perhaps you'd like to feel "Swift and strong" or "Fit and fast"? Or maybe you'd rather

MY PATIENTS' PAIN IS LONG-TERM, MINE IS TEMPORARY
Mel Floyd

be "In control" or "Slow and steady"? Another technique is to use your breathing to set the scene for self-encouragement. Try repeating the phrase "Inhale confidence, exhale doubt," or ring the changes and replace "confidence" and "doubt" with words of your choice.

Another way to find effective mantras is to scan the internet for catchy sayings and motivational quotes. As a slow runner I love, "Last but having a blast!" and Mahatma Gandhi's words: "There is more to life than increasing its speed." But as a hare you may prefer, "Run like you stole something," "Go hard or go home" or, "Dig deep." And if all else fails, use the reward you've promised yourself at the end of an event or training session to inspire you. When I entered my first Olympic-distance triathlon a few years back, despite being tempted to grab hold of the nearest kayak in the swim section and sincerely regretting that I hadn't fitted stabilisers to my bike as I wobbled nervously round the course, I used a powerful mantra to power me round. It may not be pretty, and it may not be profound, but it got me to the finish. The mantra? "Noodles and beer!"

REAL-LIFE RUNNING MANTRAS

"I chant, 'Not long until a cup of tea, cup of tea' to myself as I find that it grounds me and comforts me," says

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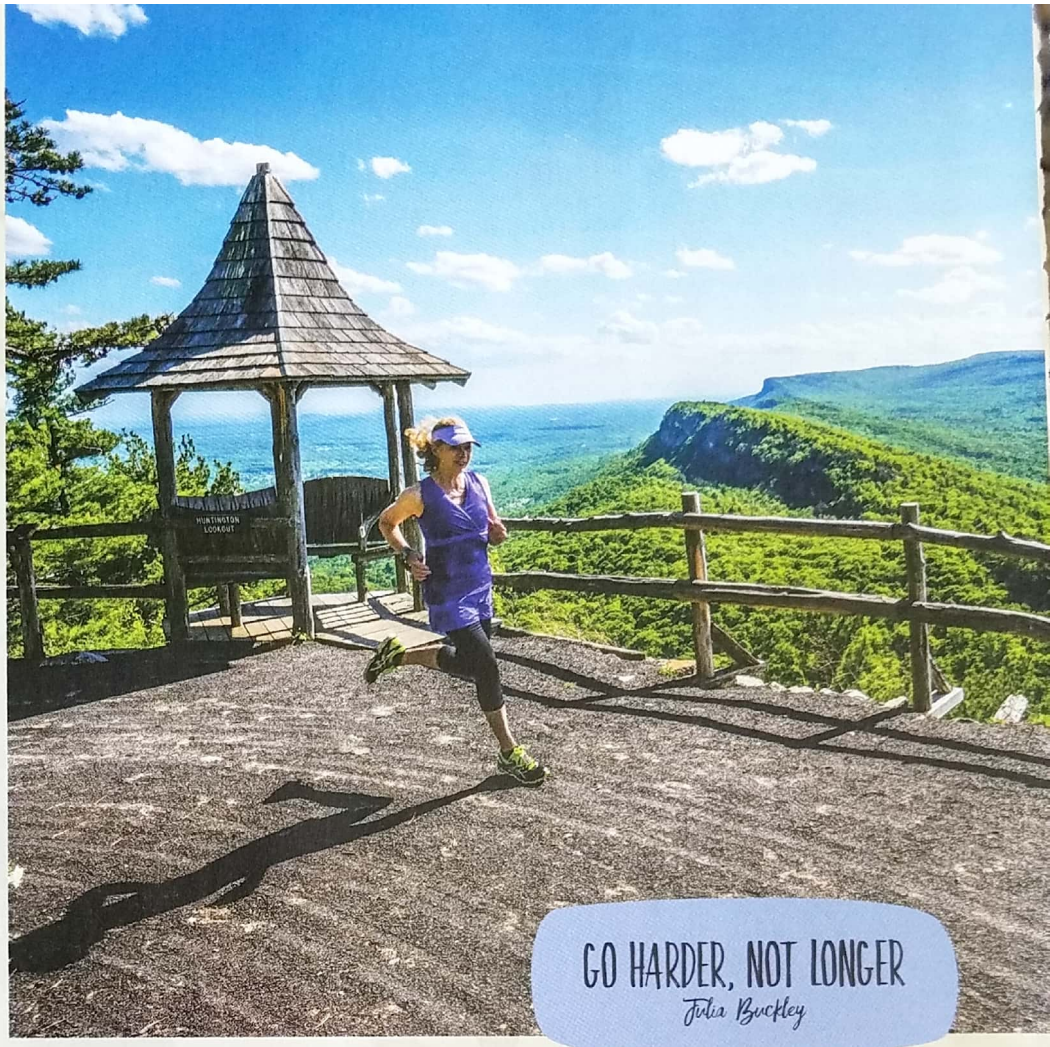
physiotherapist Kathleen Walker at the Penarth Physiotherapy Practice (penarthphysiotherapy.com). "The mantra originated during my first marathon in Edinburgh: I had a wobble at 19 miles but reminded myself that if I kept going, a cup of tea would soon be in my hand. It helped me to dampen down physical discomfort and also reminded me that whatever pain I was feeling would soon be at an end."

"'Inhale confidence, exhale doubt' is the mantra I use to boost my self-belief and control my breathing," says Nicola Kukuc, 38, from Carlisle, who ran her first marathon in Brighton last year. "Something else that's almost a mantra is an inspirational thought I play over and over in my head: 'Someone somewhere is taking their last breath right now and would do anything to swap places with you. You don't have to run, you get to run, so be grateful.'"

"Since I started running two years ago, I've slowly built up my stamina, and did my first 10K just before Christmas,"says Michele Jameson, 49, from London. "Now that I've signed up for my first half-marathon later this year, I've started using mantras and I've found they help enormously. I use short ones, such as 'Keep going!' or 'You can do it!' I often see these chalked on the roads I train on, too, which is even more encouraging!"

"My mantra is 'Go harder, not longer,'" says Julia Buckley, a personal trainer from Stoke-on-Trent and the author of *Fat Burn Revolution* (Bloomsbury Sport, £16.99). "It reminds me that getting outside of my comfort zone for a short period of time can be much more effective at increasing my fitness than plodding along at a comfortable pace for hours. When I started running, my main motivations were to shed fat and get fitter. At first it worked, but before long my progress slowed, so I upped my mileage, which triggered more progress. Then the same thing happened and this process repeated itself until I was running ultras and was obsessed with races. Within a few years I ended up ill, burned out and with more body fat than when I started. This taught me that fitness isn't all about racking up miles and medals. Now I combine strength and high-intensity interval training (HIIT) with regular runs. At 39 I'm in the best shape of my life and I'm making a living helping thousands of other people get their bodies into awesome condition, too."



"I choose a new mantra every January," says Kim McCallum, 61, from Winnipeg in Canada, who's run three marathons and numerous half-marathons. "This year it's 'You are not a greyhound,' because greyhounds exert tremendous energy for short bursts, and then laze about until their next big effort! Our winters are cold and, while I muster up the courage to go out and run on a regular basis, I also spend a lot of time on the couch in front of the TV keeping warm. This mantra reminds me to be active every day and not just on run days."

"'Be fearless, be free, be grateful' is my favourite running mantra, and I used it to great effect in the 2010 Athens Classic Marathon, the 2500th anniversary of the first ever marathon," says running icon Kathrine Switzer, the first woman to officially run the Boston Marathon in the days when women were barred from doing so. "It's something that came to me over the years, and specifically during that terrifically challenging marathon where I began to doubt my ability to finish. I was really hurting and sort of cursing my fate when I suddenly realised I was the luckiest woman in the world to even have the opportunity

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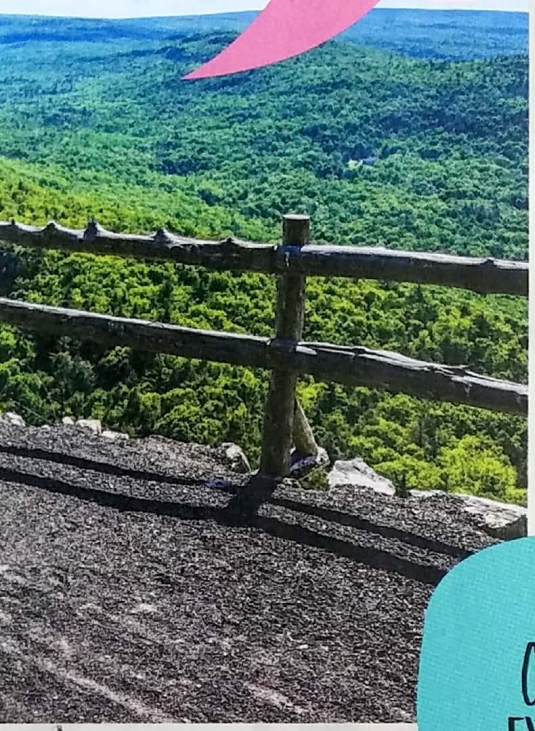
BE FEARLESS, BE FREE, BE GRATEFUL

Kathrine Switzer



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to be free and healthy enough to be able to run. And that all my life I'd felt that running had made me fearless, so I should just be fearless right now in the face of this challenge, too. It was, after all, self-imposed, and a mere blip compared to the problems most people have to face every single day. I always feel grateful for what running has given me, but never was the realisation so dramatic as at that moment."

"I counted each pace in my head during the two marathons I've run," says Louise Elliott, 55, from Hackney. "I read about another runner using the same technique in a running magazine many years ago and find it helps me to focus on the moment rather than being overawed by the distance."

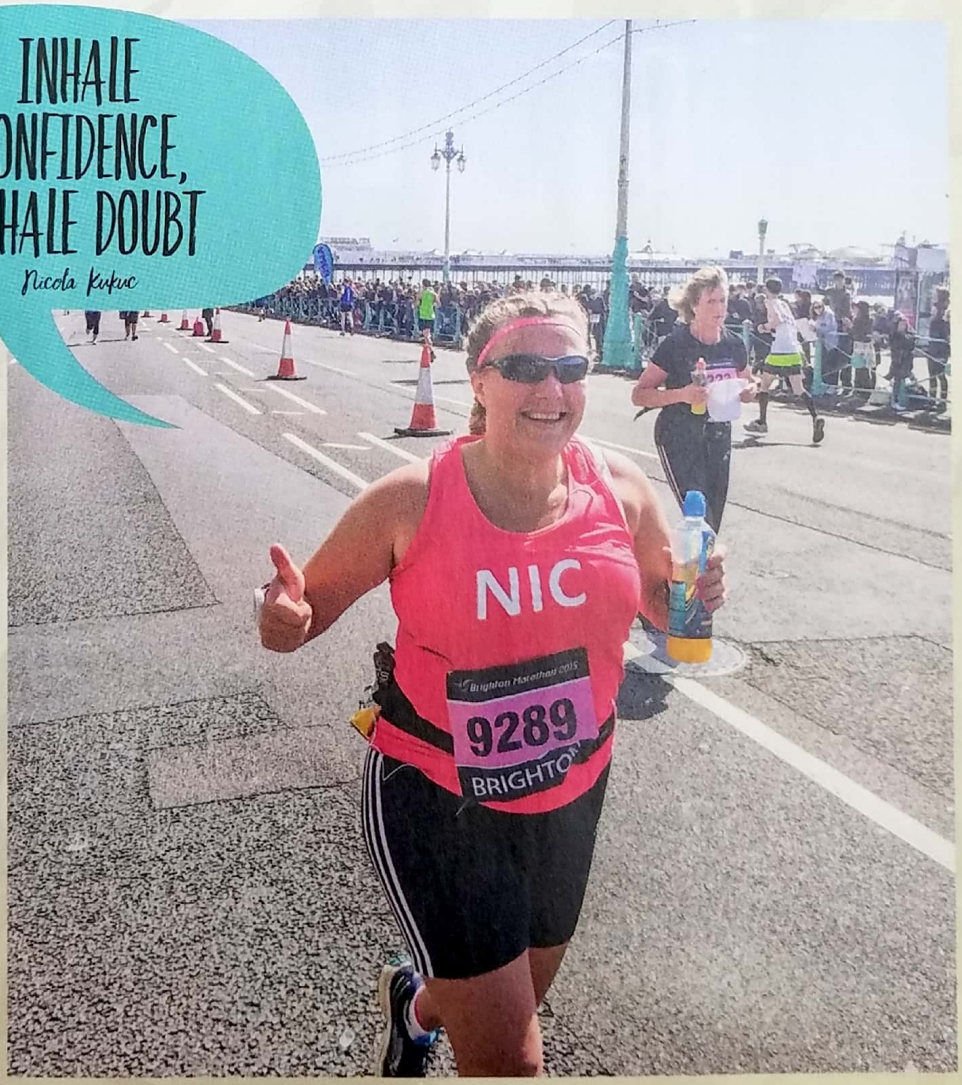
"My running mantra is 'My patients' pain is long-term, mine is temporary,'" says Mel Floyd, 45, from Thetford in Norfolk, who's completed 132 marathons and five ultramarathons since she started running in 2011. "I'm a clinical nurse specialist for patients living in the community and nursing homes, which means I assess what equipment they require to get into and out of bed and the bath and what they need to do to avoid pressure ulcers. My patients inspire me to continue running and, when it hurts, not to give in. I used my mantra to most powerful effect in my first 100K (62-mile) event, the Endure 24 in 2014. Near the end I was utterly exhausted and my legs were hurting like crazy so it was tempting to give up. But then I recalled the people I meet in my job and thought: 'Hang on, they're in worse pain than I am, and I'm sure, given the choice, they'd love to be able to run, too.' That mantra never fails to motivate me to persevere when the going gets tough."

"I have several different mantras," says Sue Atkinson, 70, from south London, who's been a runner for 10 years and has done 10 marathons, two ultras and over 20 triathlons. "I use Christian songs as prayers on the run, and 'Lead me Lord' helped me not to fall over on the rough patches during the Thames Path Challenge 100K I did last year. Mantras keep me focused; they remind me that I'm running because I enjoy it, that the pain is only temporary, and that I'll be thrilled at my achievement if I keep going.

"What gets me through a marathon is telling myself, 'I've started so I'll finish,'" says Vivien Keighley, 58, from Harrow, a veteran of 13 marathons. "It's what keeps me positive during the last few gruelling miles of every race. It reminds me that in life I'm not a quitter. That mantra helped me most when I had to tackle the horrendously steep Seven Sisters hills near the end of the 2015 Beachy Head Marathon, and also got me through the last two miles of the Plusnet Yorkshire Marathon. In the latter, I injured my hip and was 'walking like a crab on a bad day,' according to my husband, but I made it!"

INHALE CONFIDENCE, EXHALE DOUBT

Nicola Kukuc



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