

HIT THE TRAIL

Running tips for beginners

By ERIK GABLE

It's summer, and just about anywhere you go, you can see runners and joggers hitting the sidewalks and trails of Lenawee County.

Thinking about joining them? If you've never run before, here are some tips from the pros.

Decide why you're doing it.

"First and foremost, you've got to have a goal," says Eric Clarke, who owns Running With E's in downtown Adrian with his wife, Kerri. "You have to really identify why you want to do this." You might be running to lose weight, or to compete in a race, or even to run with a school-aged child who's in sports — but having a clear goal will help you stay motivated.

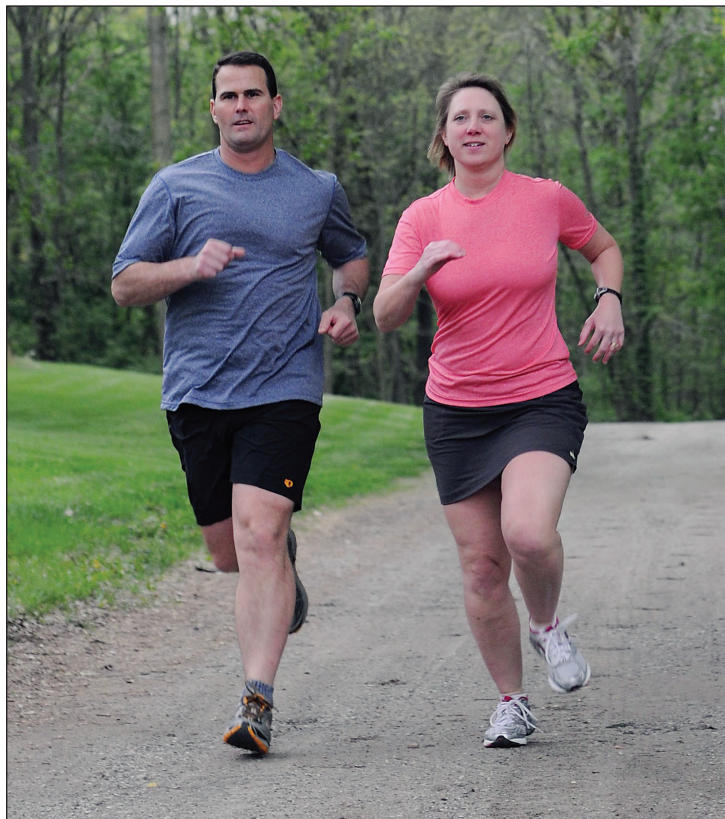
Get cleared by your doctor.

James Larson, head track and cross country coach at Adrian College, says people should get a doctor's approval before starting an aerobic exercise program. "We want you to be safe, and being cleared by a medical doctor is the first step," he says.

Get some decent shoes. "You have to get the right shoe to support the weight of the body," Larson says. Rather than just picking a pair of shoes off the shelf, Clarke recommends allowing about 20 minutes for a fitting; he and his wife can examine a customer's old pair of shoes for wear patterns that reveal what kind of shoe will be the best match.

Start slowly. "If you start out too hard, people are going to get hurt, and they lose interest because it's too hard," says Tim Bauer, who coaches track and cross country at Siena Heights University.

Clarke says new runners, especially if they've never run before, should consider starting with a walk/run program. "Within a couple of months, they'll find themselves running continuously and dropping the walking," he says.



Eric and Kerri Clarke, owners of Running With E's at 146 N. Main St. in downtown Adrian, run at Heritage Park. LAD STRAYER | LENAWEE PULSE

Vary your routine. Bauer recommends fartlek running, a technique developed by a Swedish coach — the name means "speed play" in Swedish — that involves interspersing easy jogging with sprints at a higher speed. The variation makes it fun, Bauer says, and the sprints will increase your speed capacity.

Have realistic expectations. If you've just bought your first pair of shoes, Clarke says, don't expect to be able to run a 5K in a month.

Don't get discouraged. When Kerri Clarke first started running, she found the hardest thing was breathing. "I told Eric I thought I had asthma or something," she says. But her lungs eventually got used to it.

And don't be frustrated if you can't run a mile in six or seven minutes. Your body will still be reaping the benefits of increased cardiovascular fitness even if you run at a slower pace.

Kerri Clarke, for instance, says she's a 10-minute miler — and that

doesn't bother her. "It doesn't matter how fast they run," she says, "it's just that they're out there doing it. That's the most important thing."

Run consistently. Larson says you shouldn't think of running as a fad or a quick fix; you need to stick with it. "Consistency in training is the key to success," he says.

Run with others. "Having a training partner really helps," Larson says. Every Saturday at 8 a.m., a group of people gather at Running With E's to run together; the Clarks also lead a running group that meets at 6 p.m. Mondays, May through October, at the Stubnitz Environmental Education Center in Heritage Park.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. If you're having trouble, or hurting more than it seems like you should, try getting someone to critique your running style. "You've got to treat each person individually, because they all have their little quirks," says Eric Clarke, who regularly helps

KNOW THIS

ABOUT THE GEAR

What gear should you buy if you're trying to get started running? Here's a quick look at a few of the basics — and a few popular extras.

Good shoes. If you're going to spend money on anything, it should be a good pair of shoes and some decent socks, according to Eric Clarke, owner of Running With E's in downtown Adrian. Expect to spend \$75 to \$130 on a good pair of shoes.

Good socks. Look for socks made from a wicking material that pulls moisture away from your feet as you run, Clarke says.

Comfortable clothes. Although Clarke says shoes and socks are the essentials, clothes made from a wicking material can make a world of difference. "If you go out in a wicking top just once, you'll wonder why you ever ran in cotton," he says. For women, a supportive jogging bra is also a good idea.

A heart rate monitor. These range from around \$60 to \$160, according to Steve Gariety, manager of MC Sports in the Adrian Mall. Some models use a strap around your chest that sends data wirelessly to a wrist unit; with others, you touch two fingers to the wrist unit.

More high-tech options. One relatively new addition to the world of running gear is Nike Plus, in which a sensor embedded in your shoe transmits information to an iPod Nano strapped to your wrist. You can track your mileage on Nike's Web site, Gariety says, and even use the site to compete with friends in other places. "It keeps you a little bit motivated," Gariety says.

runners with their technique.

If you're doing it right, there's no need for you to hurt yourself. Some people think running is bad for your joints, Clarke says, but "it all depends on how you run. I've been running for over 25 years and I've never had a knee injury."

Have fun. Running doesn't need to be a chore.

"On a good run in the summer, when it's 80 degrees out, you feel so good about yourself," Bauer says.

"I think running is the greatest thing you can do for your mental health. I really do."