

RUNNER'S WORLD

After Years of Struggling With Anxiety, This Mom Turned to Running

“Running has, first and foremost, given me an outlet when I need to relax and just clear my mind.”

BY NICKI TURNBOW, AS TOLD TO [EMILY SHIFFER](#)

APR 19, 2022



Name: Nicki Turnbow

Age: 36

Hometown: Lubbock, Texas

Occupation: Pharmaceutical Sales Representative at UCB

Time Running: 7 years

I started running after a long battle with anxiety that began during a mission trip in 2011. I had an amazing opportunity to go to Salvador, Brazil, to serve the community.

When I first arrived, I was shown to my bunk for the next couple weeks. I had a small spot to put my belongings, and shared a bathroom with six others. There was no air conditioner, so the windows stayed open at all times. It wasn't the safest neighborhood. There were bars on the windows, an electric fence surrounding the home, and a guard that stayed at the front door during the night. I was way out of my comfort zone.

Every morning a van dropped the volunteers off at their assigned location. I was with children at a local "daycare" that parents could take their children to for free.

We would bathe the children, feed them their only meal of the day, and pour as much laughter and fun into them as we could before sending them back home for the evening. I saw the tiny one-bedroom homes that they would go to with only dirt on the ground and no running water. But the silver lining was seeing their pure joy at the simplest things.

When I came home to America, I felt immense guilt for the lives of luxury most of us live in and take for granted.

My anxiety really took root shortly after this trip when we lost our first pregnancy with twins. I became so bogged down with anxiety that I literally did not want to move from the couch. It was a horrible cycle because I knew my feelings were irrational, yet I couldn't stop them. I would ruminate on something tiny, and in my head make it a really big issue. I then would find myself crying and spending hours on the internet trying to figure out what was wrong with me.

After we were blessed with our first born in 2012, I knew I needed to get help for my still-lingering anxiety. I was missing out on things in this life that I didn't want to miss out on. I would be in the moment physically, but not emotionally because my thoughts would be running all over the place. I was getting so frustrated with not being able to turn off my worries.

I finally got the courage to go see an amazing doctor. I sat in the patient room waiting for him to come in, and the minute he did I started sobbing and asking what the heck was wrong with me. After sharing with him what I had been battling, he simply said, "You have generalized anxiety." It's like I could breathe all of a sudden. I had someone to tell me this is not uncommon, and that this is treatable.

I started running in 2015, after I had my second child. At that point, I had read up so much on anxiety, and the constant theme I kept coming across as a way to manage it

was exercise. As a busy mom that didn't have a gym I loved nearby, I decided I was going to do the easiest and most efficient thing I could. So I laced up some sneakers and went out for my first jog.

To this day, I share the story that I literally thought I was going to die running one mile! But it ultimately became a mental challenge, and I just kept showing up. I would add 0.1 mile to every run.

Eventually, I found the indoor running studio STRIDE, which has helped me with not only my running, but also with so many amazing friendships and an amazing community.

After I was finally able to run 3 miles without thinking death was imminent, I told myself I was going to run a half marathon. My husband thought I was crazy, but I could tell how much running was helping me both physically and mentally. It was giving me time to listen to podcasts, music, think, be creative, and connect with my STRIDE community when I would take a class. So I set out to do something I never thought I would do.

Now, I like to do strength training three times a week, two 5- to 6-mile runs on Tuesdays and Thursdays and a longer run on the weekends if my kiddos' schedules allow. I'm coming off a stress fracture and I know the importance of taking care of our bodies and really listening when it says to slow down.

I think so often the term "runner" is associated with those that only do half marathons, marathons, etc., but I would love to change that stigma. If you get out and run one mile, you are a runner. I actually don't have any desire to do a marathon. My knee tends to yell at me more than I'd like right as I'm finishing a half, so I'll stop there—it's the right distance for me.

Running has, first and foremost, given me an outlet when I need to relax and just clear my mind. I laugh when people say, "I only run when I'm running away from something." Maybe that's true though. I was running from anxiety that was holding me back in my life. Call it super corny, but I'd flip it today to say I'm now running towards my dreams.

Running has brought some of the best friendships I could have asked for, introduced me to many amazing people, and pushed me to open up a business dedicated to helping people tackle both their physical and emotional goals. Running has allowed me to be the best wife and mom I can be.

One of my favorite motivational expressions is: *We will never meet the best version of ourselves in our comfort zone*. Being uncomfortable is where growth truly

happens, and it's where we begin seeing versions of ourselves we didn't know existed.

These three tips have made my running journey successful:

1. Strength train

Building strength is crucial for avoiding injury and ultimately leading to better runs and races. If you don't want to strength train on your own, hop into a class that includes strength training like at STRIDE. There are so many options to get in your strength training.

2. Stretch and take rest days

Stretching is so important, yet we tend to neglect it (I know I have). Dynamic stretching preworkout and static stretching postworkout are a must. Resting is equally important. Listening to your body is crucial. Recovery allows for muscle growth and prevents injury among a long list of other things.

3. Get sleep

Your body *needs* sleep. There is a book called Why We Sleep by Matthew Walker—it may put you to sleep, but it's chock-full of super good info that more people need to know! (While we are mentioning must-read books, Atomic Habits by James Clear is number-one on my list.)

Nicki's Must-Have Gear

→**Water jug**: This is obviously not something I take on my runs, but I carry a gallon jug around with me and fill up my Yeti cup throughout the day. Hydration is a game changer! Literally the *only* way I will get my water in daily!

→**Apple AirPods Pro**: Because podcasts and Spotify. Some of my favorite podcasts: *The School of Greatness*, *The Model Health Show*, and *Crime Junkie*.

→**Goodr Polarized Sunglasses**: They stay on my face! (I seriously struggle to find sunglasses that stay on my face.) Plus, they are polarized and cheap.

→**Apple Watch**: It allows me to be hands- and belt-free throughout my runs. I connect Spotify to my AirPods and can leave everything else at home. It's *awesome*.