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## TRAIL RUNNING

## How to Stay Safe Against Potential Threats on Trail Runs

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Safety doesn't stop at reflective gear; while most of us don't like to think of what could go wrong on a run, preparing for an event can make it easier to avoid sticky situations. "Many trail runners are often visiting places they don't know, so plan ahead," said Terry Chiplin, Owner and Director of [Active at Altitude](#) located in Estes Park, Colorado.

When it comes to your running smart, research the route beforehand, bring a map in case your phone dies and let someone know where you're running and when you'll return. "Even if you're going with somebody else who knows the area, it's always a good idea to have somebody who's not with you on the trail know where you are, just in case something happens," said Chiplin.

These tips will get you through most runs, but it's still important to know what to do when encountering specific dangers, no matter how unlikely. If you find yourself in one of these worst-case scenarios, here's what to do:

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### Potential Threat: Animals

Being approached by an unleashed pooch can be scary when there's no owner in sight. But resist the urge to keep running. "Most dogs off leash simply get over enthusiastic and want to chase a runner for play," said three-time Ultrarunner and coach at [Sharman Ultra](#) Ellie Greenwood. "Running away simply makes the situation worse." Instead, stand still and don't make eye contact. Dogs will generally lose interests if you don't engage.

If you're running where bears or larger predators exist, carry a lightweight pepper spray like this from [Little Viper](#) which you can carry on your wrist. You can also discourage attacks by alerting animals to your presence beforehand. Make noise by talking loudly or clapping your hands. If you're approached, make yourself appear bigger by raising your arms above your head and slowly backing away.

While not as menacing, bugs like ticks and even mosquitos can also pose a threat. Both mosquitos and ticks hide in tall grass, so keep away from overgrown areas. Long clothing can provide a layer of protection but if it's too hot, deter bites with repellents like [Badger Anti-Bug Balm](#).

### Potential Threat: Injury

This is when it pays to have someone knows your whereabouts. If you're hurt in a location with poor cell service or cannot move, at least you know someone will be looking for you. Make sure to wear a bright piece of clothing, so you're easier to spot and try audibly calling for help.

All runners should have a pack with a first aid kit, a form of nutrition, like a bar or gel pack and protective gear. "One of the things that tend to happen when we get injured is that we get cold," shared Tiplin. "It's worth carrying a safety blanket. They're light to carry and fold up really small."

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### Potential Threat: Dangerous Weather

Don't rely on what you see when you leave your front door. Weather conditions can change hourly, so think long term. "Dress for the conditions; what they are and what they may become," advised Nancy Hobbs, Executive Director of the American Trail Running Association. "If it is sunny and 70 when you start, but storms are forecast...be prepared [by having a] waterproof jacket."

If you think you'll encounter rain, wear appropriate footwear with good traction to avoid slipping. "Be wary about going over river crossings on an out or back route," advised Greenwood. "[You may] find water levels raised and [you're] stuck on the wrong side."

Also, look for low ground if you're running in the mountains when bad weather strikes. "Do not hurry, but move as swiftly and as safely as you can to lower terrain," Greenwood continued. "Only in worst case scenarios find shelter higher up."

### Potential Threat: Human Attack

When running in any location, scan your surroundings often and avoid wearing headphones that block out surrounding noises. If someone grabs you, fight back by kicking, screaming or using pepper spray, advised Greenwood. "The ideal scenario would be to flee in a direction where you last saw other members of the public or know there is a road and/or open area."

If there's enough distance between you and your attacker, use your phone to call for help but keep moving. "Avoid running in a direction that takes you deeper into the woods or further away from [finding] other people," stated Greenwood.

If you drop your phone in the confusion or your attacker takes it, using a coast guard approved whistle can alert others to your location. Consider wearing a body alarm, like the ones from [Runangel](#), that not only send out a high-pitched sound but can automatically alert friends to your whereabouts via text message.

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