

# Hit The Ground Running

Becoming a better runner is about more than just having good form, or hitting a PB on your latest 10km—it's about learning how to make it work for you. We turned to the pros for their best race-ready secrets. *By Yi-Hwa Hanna*



What makes you greater with every run? That was the question Adidas asked us all at the global launch of their latest running shoe, the UltraBoostX. The shoe, which boasts groundbreaking technology designed to conform to every type of foot (and woman!), and enable you to slip them on straight out of the box and be ready to head straight to the track, the street, or whatever terrain strikes your fancy, was put to the test in a series of runs across San Francisco, California. And the verdict? Aside from the fact that this is one of the most comfortable running shoes we've ever tried (whether worn with or without socks on!), the thing that makes us greater with every run? The sense of community, and the feeling of being able to smash your personal goals through a sport that you can do anytime, anywhere, both on your own or with friends. Get 'em laced up and hit the road!

## GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Want to improve your performance as a runner, or just find motivation? We asked the pros for their very own tips and tricks that take their own game to the next level, when we sat down with long-distance runner Neely Spence Gracey (who competes in distances from 5,000 metres to the marathon), middle-distance runner Brianna Felnagle (who has won countless accolades, including two state cross-country and six track and field titles), and professional runner Leah O'Connor (who is part of the NorCal Distance elite training group), at the recent launch of the new Adidas UltraBoostX shoe in San Francisco, California.

### BRIANNA FELNAGLE

"[Before I go for a big run], I prefer to eat something simple like bread—carbs!— or oatmeal, and I almost always put peanut butter with it. It's filling, and I'll just eat more of it if it's a particularly long effort. Then having a protein bar within about 20 minutes of an effort, I do that every single day. I look for bars with real sugar not fake sugar, and one that has a good protein-to-carb ratio (like a 7:1 ratio), with natural ingredients, and at least 7g of protein, and one that's 200 calories or more."

### NEELY SPENCE GRACEY

"I like to give myself an hour or two to wake up before I run, and I have that luxury because I can wake up at 6am and go running at 7am or 8am, because I don't have to rush out the door for work. But I find that that really helps get my body awake, active and moving, stretched out and loosened up, and I feel better on my run. It gets the muscles firing, and gets the body ready to perform. [You can also do some drills]—even a little bit of that will go a long way."

### NEELY SPENCE GRACEY

"My favourite [way to recover] is the hot tub! I love getting into the hot tub after a run and stretching, because my body is warm from the run, and then I get in the hot tub and I warm up that much more. I also find that I take the time to stretch if I get into the hot tub, but if I don't do that, then sometimes I'll just forget about it and move on into my life. It's like a reward!"



### BRIANNA FELNAGLE

"When you run, doing it for you is really important. Ask yourself what you want to be at your happiest and your most fulfilled, whether that's a weight loss or a fitness goal, or just feeling like a stronger person in general; someone that can set a goal or stick to it. Or if it's camaraderie [you're after]. Find a reason that really matters to you and that's going to affect your happiness, in a good way."

### BRIANNA FELNAGLE

"[A lot of] people think that you have to be passionate about something to start it, and I think you'll actually find that the more you invest into something, and the more you commit and sacrifice, the passion follows. You will learn things about yourself that you didn't even expect to surface that way. Don't say "just because I'm not there [yet] doesn't mean that I shouldn't even start."

### NEELY SPENCE GRACEY

"The amazing thing about running is that you're setting your own personal goals. And if you achieve them, that's your success and your victory. Setting those goals and writing them down is really helpful. They say if you write down your goals you're like, 90% more likely to achieve them! It'll remind you each day why you're doing it."

### LEAH O'CONNOR

"I think [when it comes to self improvement, or finding your passion to run], making the comparison between yourself and other anyone else is harmful. If you're focusing on professionals or people that are outside of your own goals and what you need to be healthy and at your best, you're starting off at the wrong place! Ask yourself what your goals are, find your purpose that way, and that's where the passion will come in."

### BRIANNA FELNAGLE & NEELY SPENCE GRACEY

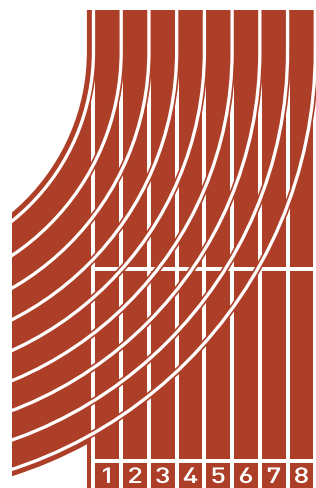
"What can make you a better runner? To me, it's consistency, sleep, and finding out what makes it fun for you—what makes you enjoy it." - Brianna

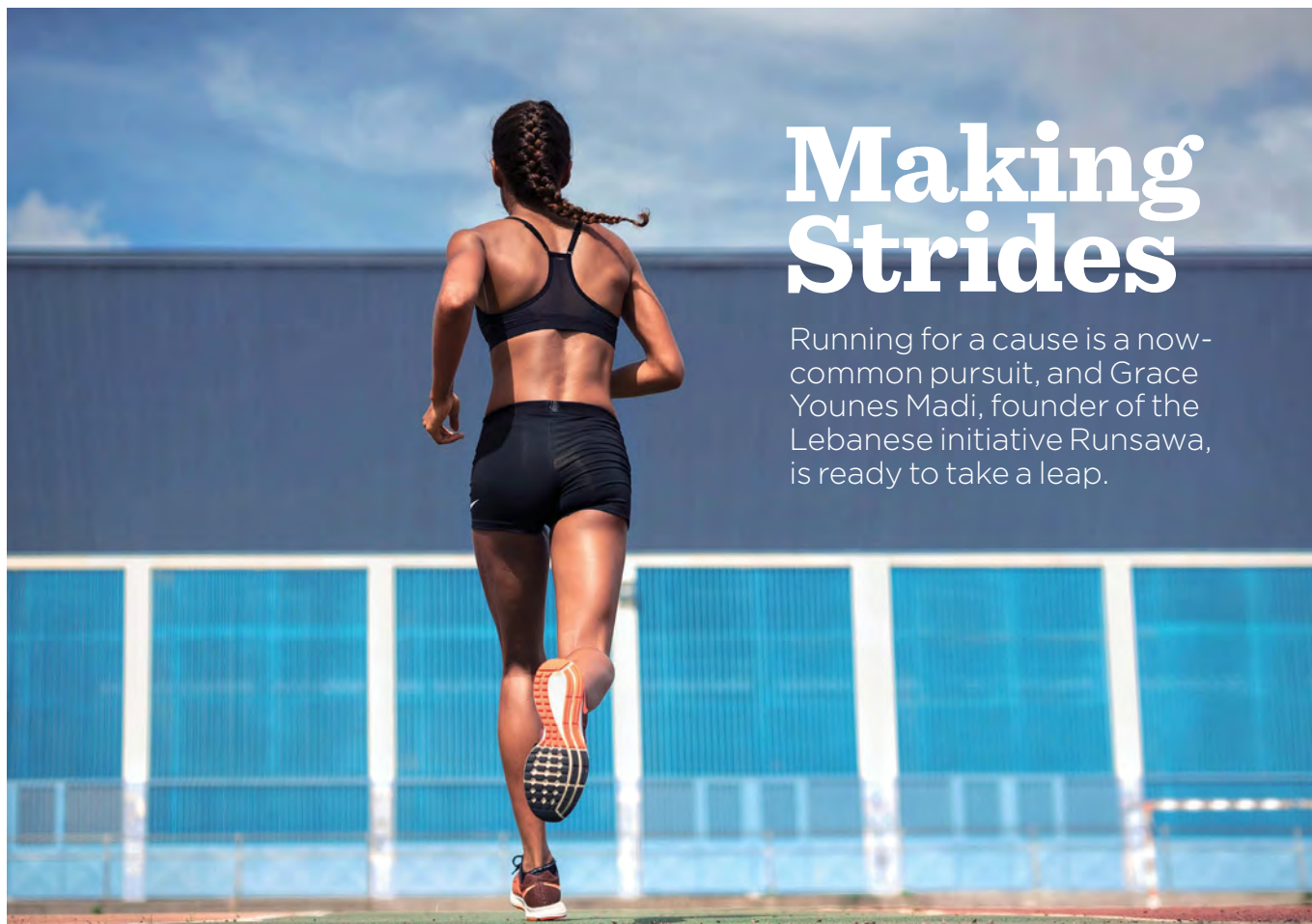
### NEELY SPENCE GRACEY

"The thing I find the most as a coach is that often times, people run too fast. They run too hard. When you're running on an easy run, you should be able to have a full conversation. And it should feel pretty relaxed and comfortable. If you hit a hill or something it'll be harder, but the key is to slow down, and then you won't have to stop."

### LEAH O'CONNOR

"Some people say they can't run long distances because their body is a certain way, and I don't think any of us... well, we didn't roll out of the womb being able to run! There are certain body types that take to it faster, but again it's just consistency and getting out the door every day and doing the runs. Your body is capable of doing it."





# Making Strides

Running for a cause is a now-common pursuit, and Grace Younes Madi, founder of the Lebanese initiative RunSawa, is ready to take a leap.

Five women. Seven days. One ultramarathon. Founded in 2016, the RunSawa initiative was created by Grace Younes Madi, the head of the Project Management Office at Bank Audi, one of the leading banks in the Middle East. Her idea? To bring the community together for a good cause, using fitness as a way to raise funds for those in need, and enable women to join forces to run for a charitable cause, in this case, in an ultramarathon in Lebanon. “The challenge was to run an ultramarathon (250km in 7 days) for autism, in support of the Lebanese Autism Society. Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability in our nation, and today, one in 68 individuals is diagnosed with autism, making it more common than paediatric cancer, diabetes, and AIDS combined. It occurs in all racial, ethnic, and social groups, and affects

boys four times more than girls. As the cost of education for one child with autism is \$12,000, RunSawa hoped to secure \$236,746 to cover the Lebanese Autism Society operating cost deficit for the year 2015-2016,” Grace says.

## A Community Initiative

The name of the group itself hints as to their aim—the word “Sawa” means “together” in Arabic—and while it began in Lebanon, their goal is to choose a local challenge and cross several towns and cities to help raise funds, as well as conduct daily awareness talks in the region they stop at every day. “What could be better than a community working together for the present and for a bright future? In RunSawa, we wanted to build in this concept because this is what we believe in and the code we live by. The association between running

and charitable fundraising has exploded into a defining characteristic of the sport. Thousands of races take their name and/or mission from the charities they support. Hundreds of thousands of runners find motivation, inspiration and approval from dedicating their personal race to a greater cause. Charitable running is considered one of the highest forms of giving, because it relies on someone’s strength and willpower to be able to achieve the goal set. When I started my preparation for my first marathon in 2014, I understood what it takes to run 42km; the amount of giving that we put from ourselves during the run. And I couldn’t imagine doing it for nothing, I had to share it with somebody,” says Grace, explaining that she feels that running is one of the most peaceful sports she could undertake, and that she feels sports as a whole

is a language that can be understood across all ethnic and societal backgrounds, thus making it a great way to bring the community together. The cause itself was also important to Grace, explaining that it’s not just the awareness she wants to help raise, but the actual funds needed to help support the families with autistic children who are in need of financial aid, and working with the Lebanese Autism Society in order to do so. Even after their first run was completed, Grace and her team of runners—a varied group, made up of housewives, entrepreneurs, managers and students all bound together by their goals—continued to support the initiative by encouraging others to donate to the cause via their Facebook page ([Facebook.com/RunSawa](https://www.facebook.com/RunSawa)). By taking steps as a community, they hope to make leaps and bounds for their cause. ■