



## **How to Run in Mud**

Skiers use the term “spring conditions” somewhat loosely, referring to thin cover, icy mornings, and slushy afternoons. For trail runners, the term translates into one thing: mud. Spring is when trails become streambeds and havens for shoe-sucking muck that will make any clean carpet shriek. Rain and melting snow overpower thawing soils and, voila; what were once hard, if not icy trails become sludge fests that can be even more slippery than they were when covered by packed snow and ice.

The best way to handle muddy trails is to make like a pig, get as dirty as possible early in the run, and stop worrying about trying to stay clean. Soft mud decreases the impact from running, especially on the descents, where the mud can provide a great surface for slowing the pace without stressing your joints.

To avoid slipping, shorten your stride, run more upright than normal, and keep your elbows more angled for lateral balance. If you start to slip, try to relax and control the recovery so as not to over-react and fall in the opposite direction.

Securely tie your shoes to prevent them from being sucked off in deep mud. If using, the new Teva X-1 Racer, the speed lacing makes it very easy to attain the requisite security. When you can predict that the trail will be muddy, wear older shoes, especially if they have encapsulating collars around the ankles to prevent or limit mud seepage into the shoes. Losing a shoe in deep mud is a humbling experience — you end up kneeling with only a sock on one foot while submerging your arm in deep muck trying to fish out the shoe that was seemingly devoured by the trail.

If water is running down the trail, try to run where the water is moving fastest because that tends to be the firmest surface. Faster currents remove most of the sticky sediment, leaving behind gravel and rock. Although you’ll get wet, you greatly reduce the likelihood of getting bogged down by muddier trail edges. This technique is also friendlier to the trail because it decreases the environmental impact of widening the trail, which is what happens when enough wimpy runners try to avoid getting muddy or wet and soon convert single track path into major throughways. Depending on the sensitivity of the region’s trail system, it may be advisable to avoid certain trails during typically muddy times of the year.

Assuming some familiarity with the area and its soil makeup, color and texture often indicate the content of mud. Choosing the firmest mud usually provides a relatively steady path through a bog. Shiny mud usually has higher water content, which may mean it is more slippery, and if it is deep it could have greater suction power — like quicksand. If the mud has a high clay content, count on running with heavy feet through the muddy section of the trail, after which you should either scrape the mud off or find a body of water for a cleansing splash and dash.