

PARK RUN

“I wonder if I'm the only one in the running business with this system of forgetting that I'm running because I'm too busy thinking.” – An escape from pressure using the Nottingham Parkrun

Running can be a great activity to keep fit, whether you're a casual runner or a running enthusiast; running can help you receive not only a fitter body but also healthy mental benefits. Running can also provide an escape as Alan Sillitoe wrote in *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, writing about how running allowed the main character, Smith, to escape his bad situations emotionally and physically whenever he ran. For many people making a schedule and sticking to it can be a difficult task, and as with many sports, consistency is vital in running. One activity that can help you keep up your running is the 5k Parkrun, which is a free, weekly community event that takes place all over the UK and Nottingham every Saturday morning. One of the biggest ones that take place in Nottingham is at the Forest Recreation Ground with a course that is a blend of challenging flats and hills, snaking its way around a beautiful green park.

The Parkrun welcomes anyone and always makes sure everyone finishes no matter what your pace is. With an age range between 10 and 80 years old it really is inclusive to anyone in the community. If you are an average runner, you might want to aim for a time between 25 and 35 minutes which is the average finish time for a lot of parkrun runners. It's also easy to get involved in by registering online and then turning up with your own personal barcode. They time your score and send you the results, letting you track your progress week by week. It's an excellent way of keeping fit in a controlled and friendly environment so Why Nott give it a go?

Group or Solo

Running in a group can often be better than running alone because subconsciously you get caught up in the pace and give more effort than when you are running alone. By joining a big group of runners, it can also take away that fear of feeling like everyone is looking at you to perform. With a regular event of over 300 people in a wide range of skill groups, no one will focus on one person, so you'll be able to exercise without pressure.

The park itself is full of winding paths, so it's great for a midweek run outside of Saturday mornings. Running solo or as a pair, the park can cater to any runner as the paths all link up with each other - allowing you to plan a route that fits the distance you are aiming to achieve. For runners looking to push themselves further than just a weekly run, this park is the perfect place to keep going to set up your routes. Running solo has its own benefits as well allowing you time to think through problems stressing you out in a less stressful environment such as running through a park. Being close to nature is often a good place to be when reflecting on yourself and difficult situations. Smith in Sillitoe's novel turned to running when he was at his lowest and helped him pick himself back up and take on the world again.

Mental Benefits

While also making your body fitter running can lead to psychological benefits short-term and long-term. Runner's high, which can lead to a euphoric state as well as elevating your mood can be attributed to a chemical called endocannabinoids naturally produced by the body. Endocannabinoids increase in the bloodstream when you run as the body creates more and enters into the brain, which promotes short-term effects reducing anxiety and an easing of the mind.

Long-term benefits of running also include an improvement in brain performance and can prevent cognitive decline improving your working memory and focus. This is because the hippocampus which is the part of your brain associated with memory and learning increases in volume over time after running regularly. The ability to switch between tasks quickly and effectively is also increased. By running regularly in Parkruns and solo running this can help not only your body but also your brain.

