

AI and Running

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming part of everyday life, and the running community is no exception. More runners and walkers are using AI to create training plans, answer questions, find running routes, and even stay motivated. But can AI really improve your running? How accurate is it? And where does it fall short?

Over the next several months, the Lynchburg Road Runners Club (LRRC) will explore how AI is shaping the running community. Our goal isn't to argue that AI is good or bad, but to better understand where it can be helpful—and where it cannot.

Before we begin, one important reminder: AI is not a replacement for qualified professionals. It should never be used to diagnose injuries, prescribe treatment, or replace medical advice. Always consult a trusted healthcare professional before making significant changes to your training, nutrition, or recovery.

Can AI Increase Motivation for Runners and Walkers?

For our first experiment, we explored AI's role in motivation. We opened an incognito browser window and asked both ChatGPT and Google Gemini the questions bolded below. We chose these platforms because they are free and widely available. While sharing their full responses would make this article far too long, we encourage you to try the experiment yourself with any AI platforms you have access to.

"Can AI increase motivation?"

Both platforms agreed that AI can help boost motivation, especially in the short term. It does this by providing immediate, judgment-free feedback, offering personalized guidance that adapts as users learn new skills, and breaking large goals into smaller, more manageable steps. However, both also acknowledged that motivation naturally declines as the excitement of something new fades or people lose sight of their purpose. In some cases, relying too heavily on AI can even diminish intrinsic motivation. Ultimately, while AI can be a valuable tool for increasing engagement and supporting progress, long-term motivation still depends on personal commitment, meaningful goals, and individual ownership of the journey.

Next, we asked:

"Can AI enhance motivation for runners? This includes both new runners and seasoned marathoners."

Again, both platforms agreed that AI can motivate runners, but they also recognized that it cannot replace human interaction.

For newer runners, both discussed reducing anxiety, but neither explained exactly how AI accomplishes that. Anxiety is personal. One runner may simply need encouragement to complete a first mile, while another may be nervous about joining a running group, training for a first marathon, or returning after an injury.

To see if we could get beyond the surface-level advice, we tried a more personal prompt:

"I am a new runner, and I am nervous about how to get started."

Both platforms recommended many of the same fundamentals, including the run-walk method—a method LRRC strongly supports. But it was interesting to see where their responses differed.

- **ChatGPT** immediately offered to generate a complete training plan, despite knowing nothing about the person's age, fitness level, lifestyle, schedule, medical history, or goals.
- **Google Gemini** emphasized running apps, smartwatches, and other digital tools that could support a beginner's training.

Neither response was bad. In fact, both offered reasonable starting points. But neither addressed the underlying source of a person's anxiety.

As we asked more specific questions, the responses became more tailored—but only to a point.

That's because AI can provide ideas, encouragement, and general guidance, but it cannot truly understand the complexities of your life. It doesn't know your child was awake all night, your work schedule suddenly changed, or you're caring for aging parents. Even if you tell it those things, AI lacks the lived experience to fully understand how they affect your training.

More importantly, AI cannot replace consistency, discipline, or community.

AI isn't getting up at 5:00 a.m. for your long run—you are.

AI isn't standing at the finish line celebrating your first race—your fellow runners are.

AI can't experience the friendships, setbacks, and victories that make every running journey unique.

Your "why"—the reason you choose to run or walk—is deeply personal. AI may help you explore it, but it cannot create it for you.

For some runners, AI may provide a helpful spark of motivation or a useful place to brainstorm ideas. But lasting motivation comes from something much deeper: discipline, consistency, purpose, and the people who support you through both successes and setbacks.

If AI helps you take the first step, that's a good thing. Just remember that it's one tool among many—not a replacement for human connection or the work that only you can do.

Next month, we'll explore using AI to build training plans and find running routes.

If you're interested in learning more about AI, one of our board members has compiled a list of recommended books available upon request – just ask.