



Dr GURMEET SONI BHALLA

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READY FOR THE LONG RUN

Running happened by chance, says Dr Gurmeet Soni Bhalla, a paediatrician and allergist who works with RxDx Clinic in Bengaluru. “Since I was a fitness enthusiast, someone asked me to sign up for Sunfeast 10k marathon in 2009. I did reluctantly, and found myself on the podium. And, I was hooked,” she recalls. Since travelling is another passion, Bhalla tries to run races wherever she goes for vacations with her family.

This year, Bhalla, 50, became a member of the Seven Continents Club, which enrolls runners who have run the full marathon on all the continents. The Athens marathon was her first full marathon. Another memorable experience was the Prague Marathon, thanks to which she saw the beautiful city on the run. The Inca trail in Peru, she says, is rightly known to be the hardest

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COVER STORY

marathon. Running in rarefied air at 17,000ft in the Khardung-La Challenge in Ladakh was an ethereal experience, she says. And, the Antarctica Marathon was both challenging and exotic. "While in the Antarctica, we got caught in a blizzard and it took seven days for a special cargo plane to fly us out of there," she recalls, adding that she bonded with 50 runners from 13 countries while stranded on the continent.

With not many women participating in races, she says she finds herself on the podium often. "It is really motivating, even though I run for the joy of running," says Bhalla, who is originally from Jammu and Kashmir. She has started enjoying ultra marathons, too. They bring you closer to nature and also test your endurance, she says.

Running can be time-consuming and hence Bhalla tries to manage her time well. "I start my day early, say, 5am, get done with my run by 7am, finish household chores and then head to work," she says. "It does take discipline and motivation to stay on track. I have to cut down on social commitments to adhere to my training schedule."

Bhalla follows a 16-week programme to train for a full marathon or an ultra marathon. It comprises four days a week of running, besides strength training twice a week. "I am mindful of what I eat so I don't have to make too many adjustments except to increase my protein intake when my running mileage increases," she says.

Her husband runs, too, and they take vacations with the family around the marathon schedule. "My teenage children respect my passion for running and help me with chores," she says.

For Bhalla, running has been a gratifying and enriching journey. According to her, the perks of running include fitness, friendships, travel experiences and a chance to give back to society by mentoring and sometimes coaching friends.

HEALTH