

# Exercise your right to music or silence

By Bill Shaw

*The Facts*

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I'm slogging through the last mile of a 5-miler Friday morning and enjoying the overcast spring day, teeming with the sounds of sea gulls and other birds along the Old Brazos River. A light wind blows from the south; rain water still pools in the low places on the streets and asphalt. I thought about how I used to shut out the world with headphones on my ears and miss the multitudinous sounds all around me.

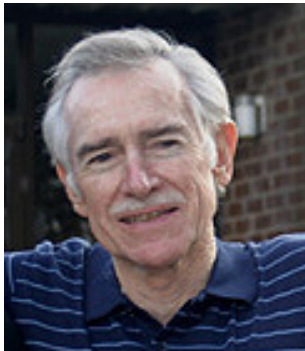
Headphones or iPod ear plugs are a long way from the bulky Walkman device I first used in my running regimen. I don't recall when I put my headphones aside to enjoy the world around me more, but it was quite some time ago. I listened mostly to classical music and "oldies" rock 'n' roll.

I never wear headphones anymore. Headphones isolate me from the world and alienate me from the beauty around me. I understand why some runners do enjoy wearing headphones and listening to their favorite music. I am alarmed, however, when runners or cyclists wear headphones and become completely oblivious to the world around them and shut out potential dangers.

Opinions vary on the use

of headphones, as do race sanctions and rules.

"I would be more comfortable with a walker or runner using headphones than a cyclist," said Kelli Calabrese, a clinical exercise physiologist, in "Ears Open" by Anna Sachse on June 4 on WorldPress.org, "because cyclists are usually moving faster, may be riding in busy roadways and need to be able to operate the bike quickly in the face of potential danger."



"Never wear ear-phones/headphones when running alone on a trail or in a remote area where animals may be present," said Tory Klementsen, certified personal trainer on EzineArticles.com. "Listen to nature's music!"

Until recently, all USA Track & Field-sanctioned events banned the use of headphones and disqualified runners who donned them. According to an article posted Feb. 4, USA Track & Field recently lifted the ban. Individual race directors can allow or ban headphones

The Road Runners Club of America promotes guidelines against wearing headphones in sanctioned events. The Road Runners Club has promoted this guideline back to the mid-1980s (see [rrca.org](http://rrca.org)) and recently adopted a universal "No headphones" icon for race directors.

"No participant shall, at any time during the event, use or wear a ... headset, radio, personal audio device, or any other item deemed dangerous by the Head

Referee," states the USA Triathlon Competitive Rules. "Any violation of this Section shall result in a variable time penalty," which means the referee will stop the competitor, take away the headset and penalize the triathlete one to five minutes. Some triathlon directors disqualify triathletes who wear headphones.

"On the positive side, playing music that is inspirational to the listener can actually make someone exercise harder than (he/she) would without music," Calabrese said. "People are also known to exercise longer when they play their desired music, whereas they are more likely to quit without it."

To listen or not to listen — to the sounds of nature and silence or to the sounds of your iPod? In your training, it is a matter of safety and enjoying the world around you or listening to music; in some races, you might have no choice.

Send your comments on the use of headphones to me at [runwriter\(at\)sbcglobal.net](mailto:runwriter(at)sbcglobal.net), and I shall publish the results of the poll and the best arguments for and against in a future column.

**Running footnote:** Don't forget the Race for the Cure 5K Run/Walk in West Columbia on Saturday. Race check-in and race-day registration begin at 7 a.m. with a race start at 8 a. m. See you at the starting line, with or without headphones.

**Bill Shaw's running column appears every other Monday in The Facts. Contact Shaw at [runwriter@sbcglobal.net](mailto:runwriter@sbcglobal.net).**

