Obstacle Course Racing on a Budget: How to Train and Race Without Breaking the Bank

Obstacle course racing (OCR) has exploded in popularity over the past decade—but so have their price tags. Between registration fees, training gear, race shoes, supplements, and travel, the cost of participation can add up quickly. A single race entry often starts around $100, and that's before you factor in taxes, credit card fees, parking, or bag check expenses. But here's the good news: with a little planning and creativity, you can still enjoy OCR without draining your wallet. This guide breaks down practical ways to register, train, and race on a budget—so you can focus on the challenge, not the cost.

Save on Race Entry Fees

Race registrations are often the most expensive part of participating in an OCR—and the price doesn't stop at the initial cost. Mandatory insurance, processing fees, and race-day parking can all add up quickly. Fortunately, there are plenty of reliable ways to cut costs or even race for free. One of the most popular methods is volunteering. Many major race series, such as Spartan or Savage Race, offer free or heavily discounted entries in exchange for working a volunteer shift. Not only does this save money, but it also gives you a behind-the-scenes look at the race, a chance to cheer on other athletes, and a sense of community involvement and giving back.

Another smart strategy is to purchase your next race at the event venue; many races offer significant discounts on future race registrations if you buy them onsite. If you're planning to do more than one race, also consider investing in a multi-race or season pass. Programs like the Spartan Trifecta or Season Pass offer substantial savings for repeat participants. Signing up for race newsletters or following them on social media is another easy way to catch holiday deals, flash sales, or promo codes that race series campaign throughout the year. Additionally, resale platforms like Facebook Marketplace and OCR community groups often have secondhand entries from racers who can no longer attend. Asking for a race entry as a gift for your birthday or a holiday is also a great way to make your goal part of a meaningful celebration. Lastly, check with your employer's wellness program—some companies offer incentives or reimbursements for participating in athletic events.

Gear Up Without Going Broke

It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking you need the latest high-end gear to be successful at OCR. Between trail running shoes, hydration packs, gloves, and compression gear, expenses can escalate quickly. But the good news is that OCR is meant to be gritty, and your gear doesn't have to be fancy to be functional. Shopping for gently used gear on sites like eBay, Poshmark, or Facebook Marketplace is a great way to score quality items at a fraction of the cost. Since everything gets muddy and worn anyway, used gear makes perfect sense.

You can also save by joining rewards programs offered by outdoor and athletic brands. Companies like REI offer membership perks such as annual dividends, birthday discounts, and exclusive sales. Applying for brand ambassador programs for gear that you use is another excellent option—many companies support everyday OCR enthusiasts with discounts, commissions, and free gear in exchange for promotion and participation.

Train Smarter, Not More Expensively

You don't need a pricey gym membership, personal trainer, or elaborate home setup to train for an obstacle course race. Some of the most effective training tools are free or very inexpensive. Get creative and build your own equipment—use a Home Depot bucket filled with rocks for heavy carries, milk jugs for farmer's carries, or DIY sandbags using heavy-duty garbage or military bags. A basic pull-up bar in your backyard or at a nearby park can cover a wide range of grip strength exercises.

Look for free or low-cost training locations like school tracks, community parks, or playgrounds for things like monkey bars and other grip training structures. Many cities even have OCR-specific training gyms and facilities that offer affordable day passes. You may be lucky enough to find a community-sponsored free facility such as Fort Pain in Peachtree Corners, where you can practice grip strength and obstacle skills—or you might even want to make a trip there to take advantage of its unique, dedicated setup. Don't forget to tap into free online training resources as well. Many OCR race series offer downloadable workout plans tailored to beginners or intermediates, and countless coaches share tips and routines through blogs, YouTube, and social media.

Cut Travel Costs Without Cutting Adventure

While traveling to scenic or rural race venues can be a highlight of OCR, travel expenses can be tough on the budget. Carpooling with teammates or local racers is an easy way to split gas, tolls, and parking fees, and it also makes the trip more fun and social. OCR Facebook groups and local gyms are great resources for finding people headed to the same event, just be sure to prioritize safety and make responsible arrangements.

Camping near the venue can also drastically reduce costs compared to hotels—and it adds to the adventure. Many campgrounds offer shower facilities, and some "glamping" options include basic creature comforts at a fraction of the hotel price. If you travel often, put those travel rewards to work. Credit card points, hotel loyalty programs, and airline miles can help offset the cost of getting to and from your race destination.

Final Thoughts: Price Is Not An Obstacle

Obstacle course racing can come with costs, but that doesn't mean you have to break the bank to chase your next finish line. With a little creativity and resourcefulness, you can train, race, and even travel on a budget—while still enjoying all the challenge and excitement the sport offers. Success on the course isn't about how much you spend on gear, training equipment, and fancy hotels; it's about the effort you put in, your grit to push through challenges, and your determination to cross the finish line.