

Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®



Support Your Community

Since running is relatively inexpensive and a great way to stay in shape, the popularity of 5k races has dramatically increased over the past few years. By running a 5k and donating money through your entry fee, you are supporting a larger cause and meeting new people who share similar interests and goals.

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Training to Run Your First 5k

SO YOU'VE STARTED A WALKING PROGRAM and, after a few weeks of consistent improvement, you feel you're ready to pick up the pace and run your first 5k race. Whether your goal is personal fitness, a sense of community or a pure sense of accomplishment — you can find yourself at the finish line on race day.

A 3.1-mile race is the perfect length to aim for as a beginner. Begin by setting attainable goals to keep you motivated and give yourself ample time to move to the next level. If you train correctly and follow a good eight-to-10 week training program, running can lead to a lifetime of fitness.

Set Attainable Goals

The length of a 5k is a relatively easy goal to reach as a novice runner, but it may also challenge the expert runner depending on intensity and speed. Start out with a simple program that allows you to succeed and move forward only when you feel comfortable with your current stage. To avoid burnout or injury, do not push your limits. Remember that your main goal is to reach the finish line. For your first race you should plan on enjoying the run and feeling good for having completed your goal.

Improve Your Heart and Head

Accomplishing your goal improves your self-esteem and keeps your cardiovascular system in tune. A regular training program includes exercising for at least 30 minutes three to five times per week, which falls within basic cardiovascular fitness guidelines. Running can lead to a feeling of freedom and independence, and it is also one of the best ways to alleviate stress since it releases alpha waves in your brain, leaving you relaxed and invigorated.

Take Your Time

Depending on your training base, an eight-to-10 week program should be just enough time to have you running for the full 30 minutes, which is the

approximate time it will take you to complete your first 5k. Your first step should be a complete medical exam to make sure it is safe for you to begin a running program. Begin with a walk/run program four times per week for 20 to 30 minutes.

If you have not previously been involved in a walking program, it may be best to start with an eight-day walking program routine ready to begin running. Begin by walking for 20 minutes the first four days, followed by walking for 30 minutes the last four days. If you have no problems with this program, try running for two minutes and walking for four minutes five times consecutively for a total of 30 minutes. Do this routine three times per week until you feel comfortable. Each week as you are ready add one minute to the running time and subtract one minute from the walking time. Increase each week until you are running comfortably for the full 30 minutes.

Be Smart and Safe

Now that you can run for 30 minutes, do not concern yourself with pace or distance. Gradual training is the key to long-term success and rest time is just as important as the time you spend training. Be sure to have proper running shoes that suit your individual needs, and be aware of the surface you are running on as well. The best running surface is a track. If you do not have access to a track, asphalt is better than concrete, and dirt or silt alongside the road is even better.

Beginning a running program may improve your entire life as it strengthens your cardiovascular system, ties you to your community, and boosts your self-esteem while also allowing you to appreciate the outdoors. From the novice to the expert runner, a local 5k race is a great way to get in shape and improve your sense of health and well-being.

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 5820 Oberlin Drive, Suite 102, San Diego, CA 92121, 800-825-3636; or, go online at <http://www.acefitness.org> and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts.