

FitFacts®



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.

A 5K—a 3.1-mile race—is the perfect length to aim for as a beginner. Begin by setting a realistic training schedule to keep you motivated and give yourself ample time to move to the next level. Beginning a running program may improve many facets of your life, as it builds your cardiovascular system, may boost your self-esteem and may strengthen ties within your community 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.

SET ATTAINABLE GOALS

While the length of a 5K may be a relatively easy goal to achieve as a novice runner, designing the training program can present quite a challenge. 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 enjoy the run and feel good for having reached your goal, rather than going for a certain time.

TAKE YOUR TIME

Depending on your training base, a five-week program should be just enough time to have you running for the full 3.1 miles. 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 25 minutes. Plan to add a little variety to your training by alternating every other day with 20 to 30 minutes of an aerobic cross-training activity to build your cardiovascular fitness.

Select a starting distance that you are comfortable with. Perhaps it is 1.0 to 1.5 miles. Increase the distance (and duration) by approximately 10 to 15% each week. For example, increase the duration of your walk/run from 25 minutes to 28 minutes in week 2.

Vary your runs during the week to break the monotony. Choose one or two days a week to run your distance, and use the remaining days to focus on shorter, harder runs or interval-type sessions. Make sure to take one to two days off per week to let your body recover. Gradual training is the key to long-term success and rest time is just as important as the time you spend training.

BE SMART AND SAFE

Be sure to have proper [running shoes](#) that suit your individual needs, and be aware of the surface on which you are running. The best running surface is a rubber 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.

NUTRITION AND HYDRATION

Never run on an empty tank. Consume a light carbohydrate snack one to one-and-a-half hours before your runs and be sure to adequately hydrate. Drink plenty of fluids, but make sure you drink at least 16 ounces two to three hours before your run. Plan to drink 7 to 10 ounces of fluids every 15 minutes during your run and eat a light carbohydrate and protein snack soon after the run if possible. Monitor your hydration by weighing yourself before and after the run, making sure you drink enough fluids after your run to replace the weight lost.

RACE DAY

If you aren't familiar with the race course, check it out on one of your training runs or do a drive-by. It's easy to get mentally and physically fatigued when you don't know where your run ends and how much farther you have to go. Also, be sure to avoid running at a pace that is faster than your training pace.

For your first race, there is some running etiquette that you should be aware of:

- Don't cut someone off unless you're at least two paces in front of them.
- Make sure there is no one behind you if you're going to spit or throw away a cup from the water stations.
- When you cross the finish line, don't stop moving. Keep walking down the chute to prevent a traffic jam.
- If you're on a team, cheer on teammates that finish behind you. That extra encouragement may be the boost they need to finish hard.

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 or raising money through donations, you are supporting a larger cause and meeting new people who share similar interests and goals.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[American Running Association](#)