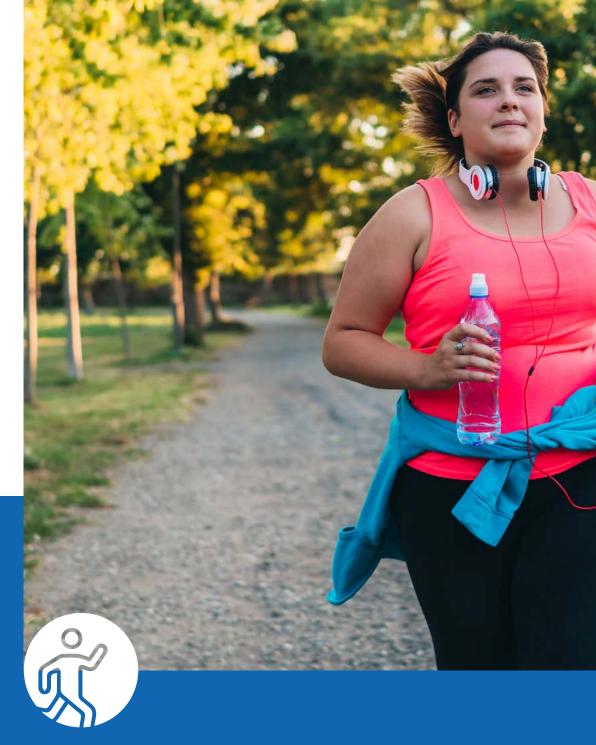# BEGINNER TO 5KM TRAINING PLAN

Training towards a 5k is a great goal for beginner runners. Now that parkrun – the free weekly 5k – is available in parks across the country, it's never been easier to test yourself over the distance in a welcoming, inclusive environment.

IS IT NORMAL TO FEEL PAIN DURING RUNNING?

Some discomfort is normal when you start training, but real pain isn't normal. If something feels so bad that you must run with a limp or otherwise alter your stride, you're probably injured. Stop running immediately and take a few days off. If you're not sure, try walking for a minute or two to see if the discomfort disappears. If it doesn't disappear, consult your GP. Contrary to what some people suggest, you cannot "run off" an injury.

WHY FOLLOW A 5K TRAINING PLAN?

If you've never run a 5K, the thought of running continuously mile after mile may seem intimidating. Of course, you can lace up your shoes and head out for a jog several times each week, increasing your mileage with the intention of eventually reaching the 3.1-mile mark (5k). But a structured training plan helps you achieve that goal in small, attainable steps.

This plan, each week you'll make small increases in your running distance while making slight decreases in your walking intervals. At the end of six weeks, you'll be ready to run the 5K distance without a walking break. (Although if you want to take walking breaks during the race, that's fine, too.)

HOW TO USE A 5K TRAINING PLAN

Although this schedule below is for beginners, it's best not to use it, if you've been inactive for the past three months or more. Ideally, to start this training programme, you're able to run non-stop for 5 minutes. If you're a total beginner, build your fitness with a four-week effort to run 1 mile before taking on the 5K distance.

Before starting familiarise yourself with important training concepts, such as cross training, recovery days, interval training, and self-evaluation.

CROSS TRAINING

You'll see that your training programme suggests that you cross-train on certain days. Cross training simply means that you do some form of exercise that is not running.

Cross-training can be; cycling, yoga, swimming, or any other activity (other than running) that you enjoy. Strength training two to three times a week is recommended for health in general and is also beneficial for runners. Studies have shown that when runners participate in regular resistance training, they enjoy improvements in muscular strength, running economy, muscle power, and better performance in running, up to a 10K distance.

INTERVALS

In running, intervals are short bursts of increased effort. Sometimes runners do speed intervals or hill intervals to challenge themselves and improve their overall performance. It also helps runners learn varying paces and efforts. Studies suggest that sprint interval training is an effective way to improve both endurance and power in trained athletes.

Interval training might seem more advanced, but incorporating intervals also provides variety and fights boredom.

REST DAYS

Rest days are just as important as running days in your training. Rest days give your body and brain a chance to recharge and renew. So be sure that you give yourself the amount of recovery that is provided for each week.

When looking at the weekly plan, modify as needed to fit your personal schedule. You don't have to do your runs on specific days; however, you should try not to run two days in a row.

EVALUATING YOUR PROGRESS

Be mindful of how you feel as you move through the training. Take note of your energy levels and your ability to stay consistent. If you find that you are moving too quickly, you can stay on a week and repeat the workouts before moving on to the next week. This may mean

that you postpone your 5K event (if you signed up for one). But postponing your race is smarter than pushing yourself to the point of burnout or injury to stay on schedule.

5K TRAINING SCHEDULE

Week 1

- Day 1: Run 5 minutes, walk 1 minute. Repeat 3 times.
- Day 2: Rest or cross-train.
- Day 3: Run 6 minutes, walk 1 minute. Repeat 3 times.
- Day 4: Rest.
- Day 5: Run 7 minutes, walk 1 minute. Repeat 3 times.
- Day 6: Rest or cross-train.
- Day 7: Rest.

Week 2

- Day 1: Run 7 minutes, walk 1 minute. Repeat 3 times.
- Day 2: Rest or cross-train.
- Day 3: Run 8 minutes, walk 1 minute. Then, run hard for 1 minute, walk for 2 minutes; repeat 3 times. Finish with a 7-minute run and a 1-minute walk.
- Day 4: Rest.
- Day 5: Run 9 minutes, walk 1 minute. Repeat 3 times.
- Day 6: Rest or cross-train.
- Day 7: Rest.

Week 3

- Day 1: Run 10 minutes, walk 1 minute. Repeat 2 times.
- Day 2: Cross-train.
- Day 3: Run 12 minutes, walk 1 minute. Then run hard for 1 minute, walk for 2 minutes. Repeat 4 times.
- Day 4: Rest.

- Day 5: Run 13 minutes, walk 1 minute. Repeat 2 times.
- Day 6: Rest or cross-train.
- Day 7: Rest.

Week 4

- Day 1: Run 15 minutes, walk 1 minute. Repeat 2 times.
- Day 2: Cross-train.
- Day 3: Run 17 minutes, walk 1 minute. Then add two intervals where you run hard for 1 minute, walk for 2 minutes.
- Day 4: Rest.
- Day 5: Run 19 minutes, walk 1 minute, run 7 minutes.
- Day 6: Rest or cross-train.
- Day 7: Rest.

Week 5

- Day 1: Run 20 minutes, walk 1 minute, run 6 minutes.
- Day 2: Cross-train.
- Day 3: Run 15 minutes, walk 1 minute. Then run hard for 1 minute, walk for 2 minutes. Repeat 3 times.
- Day 4: Rest.
- Day 5: Run 26 minutes.
- Day 6: Rest or cross-train.
- Day 7: Rest.

Week 6

- Day 1: Run 20 minutes, walk 1 minute. Then run hard for 1 minute, walk for 2 minutes. Repeat 2 times.
- Day 2: Rest or cross-train.
- Day 3: Run 30 minutes.
- Day 4: Rest.
- Day 5: Run 20 minutes.
- Day 6: Rest.
- Day 7: Race Day!

PREPARING FOR A 5K EVENT

Once you have completed your plan, you may want to take part in a 5k race or fun run. You might even have one already on your schedule. To feel your best on race day, it helps to do some advance planning.

- Conditions: Mimic race-day conditions during training when possible. For example, if your race is an early morning event, you should do some of your training runs early in the morning so that your body gets used to running at that time of day.
- Fuel: Determine what kind of pre-race fuelling works best for you. You don't want race-day stomach issues to derail your experience. So, test different pre-run snacks or beverages during training and use that strategy on race day.
- Gear: Wear gear that is familiar to you. Race day is not the time to try out new shoes or running apparel. The night before the race, lay out your best running shoes and most comfortable running outfit, along with your bib number and any snacks or beverages that you plan to bring to the starting line. Then when you wake up on race day, you'll have less to think about, and you can direct your focus to having a great running experience.

TIP

If you are new to road races, it is good to learn what to expect. Ask the race organiser any questions you have about the race. It is also helpful to attend other races beforehand, observing what is going on and chatting with the runners.

WHICH 5K TRAINING PLAN IS RIGHT FOR ME?

There is no "best" 5K training plan. The best plan for you is one that aligns with your current level of fitness and is sustainable within your current lifestyle and schedule. For instance, if you know that your work and family obligations will only allow you to run 3 or 4 days per week, then you don't want a plan that requires 5 weekly runs.

If you are currently very physically active in endurance sports (like swimming or cycling), you may be able to take on a more challenging 5K training plan. If you've been sedentary, you'll want a plan that builds more gradually.

WHAT IS A GOOD 5K TIME FOR A BEGINNER?

Many new runners set a goal to finish a 5K in under 30 minutes, which is just under a 10-minute per mile pace. But there is no rule that says you should finish in any amount of time. Simply crossing the finish line is a notable accomplishment for a first-time runner.

After you run your first race and get a sense of your pace and abilities, you can set goals for yourself. Your best time in any race is called your "PB" or personal best. As you continue to run races, you can compete with yourself by trying to improve your PB.