

Running Your First 5K

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Having run hundreds of races ranging in distance from the mile to the marathon, I have grown to love some distances more than others. The 5k has become one of my favorites, and I'm not alone in my passion: the 5K (3.1 miles) is one of the most popular races in the world. The main reason for its popularity is its shorter and more attainable length (especially when compared to a marathon!). The 5k run is the perfect run to train for as part of your summer fitness routine. Even if you are not a runner you can still train and run a 5k. And if you follow these ten tips you will finish your 5k injury-free and with a smile.

1. **Set Your Goal**

A 5k race can have a great range of fitness levels, from the walker to the avid runner, so race times can range from 16 minutes to one hour. The best thing you can do is look at your time as the main competition. To avoid injury, focus on quickening your own time rather than focusing on your competition.

2. **Find a 5k and Register**

Look into races in your area that benefit charities and allow you to get involved in your community. Compuscore.com is a great website with a directory of local 5k races. Pick your race and register 8-12 weeks in advance so you will have ample time to begin training.

3. **Begin Your Training**

There are many 5k training programs out there, but the best program to start with is three days of running and 1-2 days of cross training. If you find it difficult to monitor your training consider hiring a personal trainer or running coach to help you on your way to attaining your 5k fitness goals.

- **Running Day 1** is a high-intensity day in which you run as long as you can (starting at 1 mile and adding a ½ mile each week until you reach 4 miles) with minimal walking breaks.
- **Running Day 2** is a mid-level intensity day with walk breaks when needed. Begin this training with one half to one mile and gradually work up to the entire 5K distance (3.1 miles) at a medium pace.
- **Running Day 3** is a long slow running day. Day 3 is the day where you focus on running to build your endurance and train your muscles and lungs for running a longer distance. On this day you will start with 1 to 1 ½ miles and work your way up to 4 to 5 miles.

Cross Training is Key

By weight training and performing weight-bearing exercises you will improve your 5k time and have more energy! Strength training allows you to build strength in your tendons, muscles, and ligaments to help eliminate the risk of an injury. If you find it difficult to motivate yourself to weight train or you are uncertain of the proper form, consider joining a fitness bootcamp at a local park where weight training is involved.

Always Warm Up Properly

By doing a proper warm up prior to any workout you are increasing circulation to the working muscles, which results in decreased tightness in those muscles, lowers risk of an injury, and improves your exercise performance. Before your race it is important to stretch your muscles, holding each stretch for 15 seconds, and run a light three-minute jog.

Do a Post-Workout & Post-Race Stretch

Being flexible is an important part of fitness, and exercise increases the range of flexibility in a joint. Flexibility is also specific to every sport, meaning with some sports some muscles need to be more flexible than others. Runners should focus on stretching the hip flexors, quadriceps, hamstrings, and gluteus minimus/maximus.

Get the Proper Race Fuel Prior

Remember K.I.S.S (keep it simple speedy). To have a speedy and efficient race aim to eat 100-300 calories one and a half to two hours prior to the race. You need to have energy for the race, but it's just as important to give yourself ample time to digest the food. Take it from my experience and do not try a new meal or drink on race day. Do whatever you have been doing in your training and your stomach will be thankful on race day!

Refuel After Your Workout

It is integral to eat a proper meal and at the proper time after exercise to ensure optimal performance and a speedy recovery. Although the proper pre-race meal will help provide enough

glycogen stores, the meal after your exercise will refuel your body and it is critical to help your body recover efficiently.

Think Safety First

If you experience syncope or feel any muscle pain, refrain from exercise until you visit your physician and are examined. Remember to “think safety first” to avoid injuries or any health issues. Be smart and your body will thank you by staying healthy.

It’s Okay to Be Nervous

Even after running hundreds of races I still get pre-race nervousness, and that’s okay. This is, in fact, completely normal. Studies show that these nerves are simply the adrenaline rush, which is part of your body’s natural preparation for the competition. To limit your race-day nerves, arrive at least one hour prior to the race, stretch, warm up, and do not try any new meals or drinks on race day. Do whatever you have prepared for in your training. And when the shotgun goes off at the race start, remember you’re only competing against one person – yourself. No matter what, you are a winner because you have chosen to run a 5k for yourself and making your health a priority is commendable! Congratulations in advance!