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GUIDE

Running for Beginners

From Couch to 5K in 9 Weeks

SELF-PACED PDF COURSE

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Running for Beginners

From Couch to 5K in 9 Weeks

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DISCLAIMER

This guide is for educational purposes only and is not medical advice. It does not diagnose, treat or replace care from a qualified health professional. Talk to your doctor before you change any treatment, medication or care plan, and get help promptly for any symptom that worries you.

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How to Use This Guide

This guide takes you from not running at all to finishing 5 kilometers, about 3.1 miles. You will start with short spells of easy running separated by walking, three times a week, and stretch the running and shrink the walking over nine weeks, until you can run for 30 minutes and then cover the full distance. Along the way you will learn how to pace yourself, what to wear on your feet, how to run with relaxed, efficient form, how to strengthen your legs against injury, and how to tell the difference between normal aches and pains that need a rest or a professional.

The plan is gentle on purpose. Most people who give up on running do so because they start too fast, run too often or ignore early niggles. Nine weeks is the target, not a deadline: repeating a week is part of the plan, and finishing in eleven or twelve weeks is still finishing.

How the guide is organized

- **Before You Begin** is the health check. Read it first.
- **Chapters 1 to 5** explain how your body adapts, what kit you need, how fast to go, how to run with good form and how each session is built.
- **Chapter 6** is the 9-week plan, with the rules for moving on or repeating a week.
- **Chapters 7 to 9** keep you running: strength and mobility work, aches and injuries, and food, weather and recovery.
- **Chapters 10 and 11** cover motivation and safety outdoors, then race day and what comes next.

The companion **Running for Beginners Program** workbook holds the week-by-week plan with a log for every run, the strength routine log and a weekly injury check. Read Before You Begin and Chapters 1 to 6 before your first run; the rest can be read during the first two weeks.

How the strength exercises are described

There are no photos, so the exercises in Chapter 7 are described in words, always in the same order: **Position** (how to stand or lie before you start), **Action** (what moves and how far), **Check** (what to feel and what to avoid), **Dose** (sets and repetitions) and **Progress** (how to make it harder when it gets easy).

What you need

- [ ] Running shoes that feel comfortable (Chapter 2 explains how to choose)
- [ ] Comfortable clothes, and a supportive sports bra if you need one
- [ ] A watch, a phone with a free interval timer app, or any timer that can beep at set intervals
- [ ] A route of flat or gently rolling paths, a park, a track or a treadmill
- [ ] The companion workbook and a pen

> TIP
>
> **About the examples**
>
> The people in the example boxes are composites written to show the method in action. They are not real customers, and their experiences are illustrations, not promises.

CHAPTER 1

How Your Body Learns to Run

01

Running asks a lot of systems that adapt at different speeds. Understanding that one fact explains almost everything about how to start well: why walking breaks help, why the plan builds slowly even when you feel ready for more, and why most beginner injuries happen in the weeks when people feel strongest.

Three systems, three speeds

1. **Heart and lungs: fast.** Your aerobic fitness, the ability of your heart, lungs and blood to deliver oxygen and your muscles to use it, improves noticeably within a few weeks. This is why the second week often feels easier than the first.
2. **Muscles: medium.** Your leg muscles become stronger and more resistant to fatigue over weeks to a couple of months.
3. **Tendons, ligaments and bones: slow.** Connective tissues and bones also adapt to running, but more slowly, over months. Every time your foot lands, your legs absorb forces of roughly two to three times your body weight, and these tissues need time to thicken and strengthen.

The trap is that your heart and lungs can soon handle more running than your tendons and bones are ready for. You feel great, add an extra run or double your distance, and two weeks later your shins or Achilles complain. The plan keeps the overall increase gradual, so the slow tissues can keep pace with the fast ones.

Why run/walk works

Walking breaks let your heart rate and breathing settle and give your legs short spells of lower load. They make each session feel manageable, which matters as much as the physiology: a session you finish feeling capable is one you are glad to repeat. Each week the

running stretches and the walking shrinks, so the total load rises in small steps. Run/walk is not cheating. Many experienced runners use walk breaks in long races.

The rest days are part of the training

Adaptation happens between sessions, not during them. Three runs a week on non-consecutive days gives your legs a day to recover between each one. Walking, cycling, swimming or the strength routine in Chapter 7 are good on the days in between; a fourth run is not, at least until well after Week 9.

How fast to build

You may have heard of the “10 percent rule”: never increase your weekly running by more than 10 percent. It is a sensible rough guide, but it is not a proven law, and research on new runners has not found a precise safe number. What the evidence does suggest is that sudden large jumps in running, for example doubling your weekly time or distance, are linked with a higher risk of injury. The plan’s increases are small and steady, and the rules in Chapter 6 tell you when to repeat a week instead of moving on.

THE SCIENCE

Why gradual progression matters

Running injuries are common, and most are overuse injuries: they come from doing a bit too much, too soon, for tissues that have not yet adapted, rather than from a single accident. Studies of runners consistently link a recent rapid increase in training with these injuries, and a previous injury is one of the strongest predictors of the next. That is why this plan builds slowly, keeps runs easy, and treats early aches as information rather than something to push through.

What to expect

- **Weeks 1 to 2:** your breathing and heart rate feel like the hardest part. Your legs may be sore a day or two after the first runs.
- **Weeks 3 to 5:** running spells get longer, and you start to find a rhythm. Week 5 has the biggest step in the plan; many people repeat it, and that is fine.

- **Weeks 6 to 8:** continuous running of 20 minutes or more. It becomes as much a mental challenge as a physical one.
- **Week 9:** 30 minutes of running, then your first 5K.

EXAMPLE

Feeling ready too soon

Jade, 33, found Week 2 so easy that she added a fourth run and doubled the length of her running spells. By the end of Week 3 the inside of both shins ached at the start of every run. She went back to the plan as written, three runs a week, repeated Week 3 at a slower pace and added the strength routine. The ache faded over two weeks. Her heart and lungs had been ready for more; her shins had not.

EXERCISE

Your expectations

1. What is your current activity level? (For example “walk the dog 20 minutes a day”, “nothing regular”.)

2. Which part do you expect to find hardest, and what will you do when it happens?

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WORKBOOK

Running for Beginners Program

9-Week Run/Walk Plan, Run Log and Injury Check

COMPANION TO RUNNING FOR BEGINNERS

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PART 1

Run Log

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One grid per week, filled in within an hour of each run. The column headings show each run's main set; the warm-up and cool-down are the same every time.

What to write: the date; **Done as planned?** (Y, or the number of extra walking breaks); **Effort** for the running spells, 0 to 10 (aim for 4 or 5); **Talk test** (could you speak in full sentences? Y or N); **Aches** (where, and 0 to 10); and the following day, **Next morning** (the same ache rated again when you get up).

The plan at a glance

Week	Main set	Running
1	Run 1, walk 2, 7 times	7 min
2	Run 1:30, walk 2, 6 times	9 min
3	Run 2, walk 1:30, 6 times	12 min
4	Run 3, walk 1:30, 5 times	15 min
5	Run 1: run 4, walk 1:30, 4 times. Run 2: run 6, walk 2, 3 times. Run 3: run 8, walk 2, run 8, walk 2, run 4	16, 18, 20 min
6	Run 1: run 10, walk 2, run 10. Run 2: run 12, walk 2, run 8. Run 3: run 15, walk 1, run 7	20, 20, 22 min
7	Run 1: run 18, walk 1, run 5. Run 2: run 22. Run 3: run 24	23, 22, 24 min
8	Run 1: run 25. Run 2: run 27. Run 3: run 28	25, 27, 28 min
9	Runs 1 and 2: run 30. Run 3: 5K day (Part 3), walking breaks allowed	30, 30, 5 km