

FLEX FOR SUCCESS

IF YOU ARE STRUGGLING TO KEEP UP WITH THE 5K TO 10K PROGRAMME IT'S OKAY TO BE FLEXIBLE WITH YOUR TRAINING, BUT NEVER USE THE ELEMENTS AS AN EXCUSE, WRITES **LIZ COSTIGAN**

Congratulations, you are into the third week of your 5k to 10k programme. By now you are probably in a routine and hopefully enjoying all of the positive aspects of training for a race.

If you are struggling to get all of your five training sessions in, don't worry! Five days is a big commitment. You'll be happy to hear that there is, of course, no harm in tweaking the programme a little.

If you have made the decision to run a 10k, then you want to do it the right way, but being flexible is a really important part of running. No two weeks of the programme are the same, just as no two weeks of your life are. We all have personal and professional commitments that need to take priority sometimes.

Some weeks you may be just too busy to fit your training in. It's not the end of the world! When this happens, try to complete some of the week rather than none. For example, if you usually train five days and you can only fit two days in, be sure to do your long run and then be truthful with yourself the other day. What do you need? Are you lacking strength? If so, do your strength session. If mileage is your weakness, then get out for the long or medium run.

I have given you a five-day programme, but training three or four days a week is more than sufficient to get to your goal of 10k.

Everyone is different but the long run and the strength sessions are very important, so try — if you are stuck — to get at least these two sessions in each week.

From my experience, you need a minimum three days of training to reach your goal safely and with enjoyment; the more consistent you are with your training, the better

you will feel at the start line on March 9. If — due to injury, sickness or whatever else — you miss one full week of training, all is not lost. Yes, it will be tough getting back into it and you will feel like you are starting from scratch, but you won't be.

You already have a couple of good weeks under your belt which will stand to you. If you try to play catch-up, you can risk injury so don't over-train in panic. Ease yourself back into the programme, listen to your body and progress steadily and safely. All is not lost and you can make up for a little lost time.

If your schedule only allows for three-four days to train, mix it up. Take a look at the plan and your schedule and alternate your weeks; eg if you only have three days to train this week try the following;

- Long Sunday run (7k distance this week)
- Short run and strength session
- 60-minute cross-training session

The week after you can look at leaving the short run and strength session out and completing the long run, strength session and the medium run (5k this week).

This will ensure variety and you won't lose out on any aspect of your training.

In this country if we waited for the perfect weather to run we would never leave our bed!

Winter is a great time of year to find every excuse under the sun (or clouds) not to run ... "It's too cold," "It's too dark," "My chest hurts when I breathe in the cold air."

Come on people! You are tougher than that, don't let the weather hinder your goals.

The only way to fight it is to be prepared for it. When I started running I

used to find it so hard to know what to wear.

I would go out wearing too few layers and turn into a human icicle by the time I'd reached my second mile, or else I would overdo it completely and simmer my way uncomfortably through the park.

So, dress for success by layering properly. Begin with a base layer, this absorbs the sweat from your body and keeps you dry and warm, then you'll need a mid-layer such as a fleece to insulate, and, finally, a wind/water-proof layer to protect you from the wind and rain.

A neck gaiter is a great accessory to have; it stops any little drafts getting in and protects your neck and face on those blustery cold mornings.

Like to wear an ear-warmer headband, I find I overheat with thermal hats but it is an individual preference and both can be removed and tucked away easily.

Gloves or mittens are essential; they say you can lose up to 30pc of your body heat through your hands and feet so keep them nice and toasty.

I don't mind the rain, I actually enjoy running in it. It makes me feel like a kid, so I never shy away from my run on wet days. If you are planning a run in the rain, bring a change of clothing for the trip home. Pack a towel to dry off and a change of socks and shoes. I also bring a flask of tea or hot water to sip on on my way home in the car. It warms the bones.

And don't forget the best part of a wet, wintery run is the piping hot Epsom salts bath afterwards. You really feel it's well-deserved soak.

Enter the March 9th FIT Phoenix Park 5K/10K at www.fitmagazine.ie/events

Week 3 5k-10k programme

To participate in this 10k programme, you should have no major health problems, be in reasonably good shape, and have completed the walk-to-run 5k programme.

Monday	Strength
Tuesday	5k medium run
Wednesday	Rest
Thursday	3.5k run + Strength
Friday	Rest
Saturday	60-min cross-train
Sunday	7k long run