

lifestyle, one run at a time

Maintaining a strong, efficient metabolism is really important. You are trying to create a healthy lifestyle, not a quick fix.

If you're currently at a healthy weight, regular exercise will help you avoid putting on excess body fat in the future. When you make fitness part of your everyday life, you are less likely to gain weight and be unhealthy. Running is one of the best calorie burners out there.

STRONG BODY

Running, and other weight-bearing exercises, increase bone density, which can fend off osteoporosis. Men and women start losing bone mass around age 35. Many people complain of sore joints, but running actually keeps bones strong. If you experience pain when you start running, this is normal.

If you are doing something new it will take time for your body to adapt. Low back pain can be another ailment for many new runners. Oftentimes this is linked to something else: your hamstrings may be tight, you might have uneven hips or unequal leg length? This forces you to listen to your body, to find the problem and treat it.

Running can help strengthen your body. Start slowly and build up your distance and pace gradually. If you suffer with any pain in your body, seek the help of a physiotherapist to ensure the problem isn't serious.

IMPROVE YOUR MOOD

At the beginning of my running club every week, we start the run with a lot of sad faces. By the end of the first kilometre, smiles start to appear and, by the end of the session, everyone is feeling so positive, energetic and extremely proud of themselves.

Thanks to those wonderful chemicals, endorphins, released in the brain during exercise, feelings of depression, anxiety, stress and anger are reduced during exercise. Being able to run gives sufferers the power back, so that they can control their illness, not the other way round.

BETTER ZZZS

Studies have shown that people who exercise regularly fall asleep faster and wake up less often during the night than people who are sedentary. I always sleep more soundly when I have a good run.

Going from 0 to 5k

IF YOU'VE never run any particular distance before, here are my tips to get up and running:

GEAR
First things first — get the right pair of runners. Go to any reputable sports shop and get gait analysis, which will determine which shoe is right for you. This is imperative if you want to run with minimal injuries.

WALK
If you have never run before, start by walking. Yes, it might sound simple, but you must be able to walk before you run.

TIME
Commit to three workouts a week. This is the minimum required to progress from walking to running safely.

GOAL
You must have a goal. Without this you have no focus and you will most likely give up during those bad days. Pencil in a 5k race, giving yourself time to get to that goal. Stick to the plan and keep the end in sight. That is what everyone who trains does. Whether it be a race, a dress, or an event, we all need a direction to follow.

PROGRAMME
Find a programme that suits you. There are many couch-to-5k programmes online that are perfect for beginners. Pick one and stick to it. Gradually increase your distance on each run. For example, start with 30 seconds walk, 30 seconds run, increase this to 45 seconds, one minute and so on. Try to push yourself out of your comfort zone. Never give up: that feeling of regret is worse than being out of breath.

RUN SAFELY
Ensure you warm up and cool down before and after your run. Stretching is also very important, especially after your workout.

BREATHE
It may seem crazy, but it's natural when you are exerting yourself to hold your breath. Don't do this! Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.

... and beyond

YOU'VE made it to 5k comfortably, and now progression is on your mind. First off, recognise your huge accomplishment and be proud. The next logical step is a 10k.

It can be a daunting prospect, but just think about how scared you were of your first kilometre. After finishing your first 5k you have learned lots of running skills and your confidence has increased.

Think of it like this, the first 5k is usually the hardest, you have no idea what to expect, but you're probably "in the zone" by now and are more comfortable on your runs.

Your breathing gets more relaxed and controlled.

You also now know that you have the stamina to finish a 5k. You know you can set a goal and accomplish it. You can push through the pain and self-doubt to the finish.

You've gotten to know your body better. You've pushed your limits and you know you are capable of more. This is the key to completing a 10k.

Preparing for a 10k is pretty similar to a 5k. Mentally commit to running a race. Once you put your mind to it, everything else will follow.

Sign up for a race. That mental commitment coupled with officially registering for a 10k race will ensure you'll follow through.

Find a 10k programme that suits you and your fitness level. Stick to it religiously. On those tough days, remind yourself where you start, why you are doing this and visualise the end goal. This will keep you moving forward.

Be kind to your body but know that you can be pushed. Challenge yourself to go a bit further even when you're tired, even when it has been a long day or week.

That extra push will pay off. As a training buddy said to me in the run-up to my marathon, "It's banked in the legs". If you do the right training, your legs won't let you down.

As with the 5k, listen to your body and pay attention to aches. If you are in doubt, see a physiotherapist. If you leave niggles, they can become full-blown injuries.

Rest is hugely important as you increase your mileage. You must allow the muscles time to recover for them to work efficiently. You won't be able to progress if you are exhausted and this is frustrating.

You may find as you train harder you need extra food.

This isn't a ticket to fast-food heaven. Maintain a healthy diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, lean protein and carbohydrates to fuel your new runner's body. Diets will differ from runner to runner, so you need to find out what works best for you. One thing is sure, your body won't function right with nothing in it so fuel pre and post runs.

Train with others who have done this before. Learn from them, runners are always more than happy to talk about their experiences.

A 5k is just the beginning. Where there's a 5k, there's a 10k. And where there's a 10k, a half marathon lurks around the bend.

Just wait and see.



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