



How to Prepare for Your First 5K

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Running a 5K (3.1 miles) road race is a realistic pursuit, even for a novice runner. The key to successfully completing this challenge is the preparation of training that must be completed to accomplish the task.

The first step of preparing for the race would be to have a medical exam completed. It is important to ensure that a medical doctor clears you to begin a regimen which will be pushing your heart rate to its upper limits during the training. The next step is to purchase a heart rate monitor which will enable you to track your heart rate as we slowly improve our cardiovascular fitness with the training. Each training session will not only include the running preparation, but you should briefly stretch before the training and considerably longer (hold for at least 30 seconds) once you have completed the session.

It will take approximately 8 – 10 weeks to prepare to run the 5 K race. If the runner has not had any previous experience with a running program and lives a sedentary lifestyle, walking will be the best way to initiate the training. Begin by walking for a least 15 minutes a day for a few days and then increasing about 5 minutes a day until you have achieved a total of 30 minutes walking at a brisk pace. The next step is to incorporate some interval training into the walking program by increasing your speed to elevate your heart rate to between 60 & 70% of your maximum heart rate. To find your maximum heart rate all you need to do is take 220 and subtract your age from it. Therefore someone who is age 40 would have a maximum heart rate of 180.

Once being able to walk at a brisk pace for 30 minutes (usually within two weeks) you will want to incorporate some low to medium intensity interval training into your program. A minimum of three days per week is a good guideline, but feel free to add 1 or 2 more days of this training if you do not feel challenged! This will consist of brisk walking and a heart rate of between 60 & 70 % of your maximum and then increasing your speed until you achieve a heart rate of between 75 & 85 % of your maximum for 2 – 3 minutes. You will then reduce your speed to achieve your recovery heart rate of 60 – 70 % and maintain this pace for 3 minutes before you elevate it again by increasing speed for another 2 - 3 minutes. Continue this program for approximately 30 minutes. I would maintain this schedule for two weeks keeping in mind that you will have to jog faster to achieve the 65 – 75 % of your maximum heart rate due to the heart becoming stronger and not having to work so hard.

The following 3 weeks should consist of maintaining the interval program, but increasing the amount of time to maintain 75 % of the maximum heart rate by two minutes each week. The 5th week your increased heart rate intervals would last for 5 minutes with 2 minutes in between to bring the heart rate down. The 6th week would increase the time in the higher interval zone to 7 minutes and the 8th week would increase the time in the higher zone to 9 minutes. Because of the additional interval times your work-out will last between 30 – 35 minutes based on the amount of intervals you decide to accomplish.

At this point you are almost there! The last two weeks should consist of running between 2.5 and 3.0 miles without stopping at between 70 & 80 % of your maximum heart rate. Your heart and muscles are now considerably stronger and you most likely will be thinking now about improving your time rather than just hoping to finish the race. Your hard work and preparation will pay off on race day when you experience the nirvana of running across the finish line!