

Questions from Beginner Runners

This article was written to answer the most common questions asked by new runners, and by people returning to running after a layoff of at least a few years.

How long should my first runs be?

15 minutes is plenty during the first week. After that, your goal should be to increase the time very gradually.

What should I do if I can't run non-stop for 15 minutes?

Don't feel badly. In the beginning, most people have trouble running for even a few minutes. In other words, you're normal! The following training plans are suggested...

Stage One: Takes you from ground zero to running 45 minutes using a one minute walk, 10 minute run program. This plan will get most people ready for a 5km race.

Week	Walk (minutes)	Run (minutes)	Repetitions	Total Minutes
1	1	1	7	14
2	1	2	5	15
3	1	3	4	16
4	1	4	4	20
5	1	5	4	24
6	1	6	4	28
7	1	7	4	32
8	1	8	4	36
9	1	9	4	40
10	1	10	4	44

The walk/run method this schedule above is based on is common among many running programs. Walk/run is probably most well known in Jeff Galloway's program in the U.S. and in Running Room programs in Canada.

Stage Two: Gradually weans you off walk breaks so you can comfortably run 60 minutes without stopping. This plan will get most people ready for a five mile race.

Week	Walk (minutes)	Run (minutes)	Repetitions	Total Minutes
1	1	15	3	48
2	1	15	3	48
3	1	20	3	63
4	1	20	3	63
5	1	30	2	62
6	1	30	2	62
7	1st repetition: 1 minute walk, 40 minute run 2nd repetition: 1 minute walk, 18 minute run			60
8	1st repetition: 1 minute walk, 45 minute run 2nd repetition: 1 minute walk, 13 minute run			60
9	1st repetition: 1 minute walk, 50 minute run 2nd repetition: 1 minute walk, 8 minute run			60
10	-	60	1	60

How often should I run?

Three or four days a week is recommended for beginners. It is also recommended to alternate between running and rest days. This will give your body time to recover and adapt to the stresses you're giving it.

How far should my runs be?

Mentioning distance is intentionally avoided in the plans above because if you focus on distance then you'll likely also start focusing on speed. You should avoid an emphasis on speed in the beginning, because too fast too soon can lead to injury.

How fast should I be running?

You should be able to comfortably carry on a conversation and you should not be out of breath. This is a hard guideline to follow for some people because they feel as though they are running too slow. If that's you, please remember it's vital that you focus on a pace that is comfortable in the beginning part of your running career. This is because running too fast too early does not build the proper cardiovascular improvements you need to be a successful runner – without getting into the science of it. So take your time and enjoy yourself!

I'm afraid I won't be able to stick with the plan. How do I stay motivated?

1. *Sign up for a race.* Do it now! Having a race goal (and race fees) on the line will be a powerful source of motivation.
2. *Run with a partner.* And promise to get each other through the rough patches. Neither of you will want to let the other down.
3. *Focus strongly on getting through the first three weeks.* It takes roughly three weeks to establish a habit. If you can get past the first three weeks, your mind and body will find it much easier after that.

4. *Don't overdo it.* Running too fast, too far or too often in the beginning can burn you out, make you sore or get you injured and none of those things are very motivating.
5. *Try not to focus solely on weight loss if you are taking up running to lose pounds.* This is because especially in the beginning of your running career you will likely gain some weight due to muscle growth – a very good thing because muscles burn fat. Take tape measurements and photos of your body every few weeks – to get your attention away from the scale. You'll be happy to see the inches dropping even if the pounds don't initially follow suit.
6. *Journal your experiences in a running blog or on a forum and connect with other runners for support.* You'll be amazed at just how much support you'll get!
7. Remind yourself often that you'll be fitter, thinner and will be able to run for non-stop for an hour at the end of the program!

Should I stretch?

The answer from just about anyone you asked would have been an absolute “yes!” only a few years ago. But more recent research has been telling us other things:

1. Stretching before running may actually be bad for you. It may lead to injury.
2. It is better to warm up slowly (for example by starting out walking) than to stretch before you run.
3. Stretching after five minutes of easy running is more advisable than stretching before running.
4. Stretching after you run is always a good thing.
5. Doing stretching as a standalone activity (such as taking up yoga) can be extremely beneficial to runners.

Should I change how I eat now that I'm running?

Nutrition is not a big issue for beginners running under an hour a day. You really do not need to add anything special to your diet. This is a good time to fix your nutritional habits if they were poor before you started running. Water is a runner's best friend. Drink water before and after you run.

I am taking up running to lose weight. How much can I expect to lose?

Ahhh, the age-old question. There are many factors to consider. Here are a few things for you to think about:

1. Running is at the top of the list of activities for the number of calories it burns – so you've made a good choice including it in your weight loss strategy.
2. Many runners don't lose weight because they reward themselves for running by eating more or binging. So rewards are sometimes not very rewarding in the long term.
3. You are likely to lose weight running 30 or so minutes three times a week. However more pronounced weight loss usually doesn't happen until you are running more frequently and for longer durations. The message: Stick it through as a beginner and you'll reap the benefits in much greater quantity for the rest of your running career.