Become a Runner: **EIGHT WEEKS TO 5K**

BY SAGE ROUNTREE

By February, your New Year's exercise routine should have become a habit. (Or maybe it's time to recommit!) To test your progress—or to keep you motivated—try running a local 5K. You can find one near home by looking online at ActiveZach.com.

Here's a training plan to get you through that 5K, whether it's your first ever or your return after some time off. My presumption: you are comfortable with 30 minutes of cardio activity, either walking or on machines at the gym, but you don't run much. (If you're not up to 30 minutes of continuous aerobic exercise, choose a later race and build your way up to 30 minutes gradually.) Your goal: running an entire 3.1-mile race and enjoying it.

Let's get out of the gym and onto the road (or trail)!

EQUIPMENT

You need a good pair of shoes suited to your stride—visit your local specialty running store; a soft surface for your training (trails are preferable to asphalt, which beats concrete); and, optionally (but it's quite helpful), a training partner, human or canine.

TRAINING

The training plan shown here gives you four weeks to build your comfort with running, then four weeks to establish some speed for the race. Tuesdays and Thursdays are "sandwich" days—start and end easy, with a slightly harder segment in the middle. In the first four weeks, the bread of your sandwich can be walking; the filling is a jog. In the second four weeks, use jogging as your bread and a comfortably challenging run as the filling. In the second block, Tuesdays are club sandwiches—run slightly harder ("on") than you do on Friday sandwich runs, and enjoy a two-minute jog ("off") between the 5- or 6-minute efforts.

Take at least one day each week (say, Monday) off; another (Saturday) is for cross-training 30–60 minutes, or take a second day off. Cross-training might be swimming, biking, hiking, or rowing, plus some core work. Thursdays are for easy runs—walk as you need to in the first four weeks. Sundays are for longer easy runs, ideally with a friend of similar speed. Take walk breaks if you need them, but if you can run continually, please do.

Be sure to complement your running with core strength and flexibility work (on this plan, Wednesdays). Doing a yoga or Pilates class each week, plus some core work and stretching after each workout (try my short podcasts at sageyoga-training.com), helps keep you strong, flexible, and injury-free.

AFTER THE RACE

Make a note in your training log about how the race went. In addition to noting your time and your mile splits, if you have them, write down how you felt, which parts went well, and what could use improvement next time. Also note the terrain and whether the race was crowded, since both affect your time. This will help you track your progress as a runner from race to race. After a few 5Ks, you may be ready to move up the ladder to harder workouts and longer races. Gradual progress is key.

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M	T (SANDWICH)	W (STRENGTH)	TH (EASY)	F (SANDWICH)	SAT	SUN (LONG)
Off	10–10–10	Core/flexibility	30	10–10–10	Cross-train or off	40, with walk breaks as needed
Off	10–15–10	Core/flexibility	35	10–15–10	Cross-train or off	45
Off	10–20–10	Core/flexibility	40	10–20–10	Cross-train or off	50
Off	10–10–10	Core/flexibility	30	10–10–10	Cross-train or off	40
Off	10–(3 x 6 on, 2 off)–10	Core/flexibility	40	10–20–10	Cross-train or off	50
Off	10–(4 x 5 on, 2 off)–10	Core/flexibility	40	10–20–10	Cross-train or off	50
Off	10–(4 x 6 on, 2 off)–10	Core/flexibility	40	10–20–10	Cross-train or off	50
Off	10–10–10	30 easy	Off	15 easy	5K	Smile!

* Times are in minutes.