



5K Run Guide

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Get Ready To Run!

We're excited to be part of your journey—whether you're training for a marathon or getting out the door for the first time.

Here are some of our favorite features to help you take your skills to the next level.



Choose your activity.

Running, cycling, walking, wheelchair—you can track it all.



Connect your music.

Get on beat with Spotify or your music library.



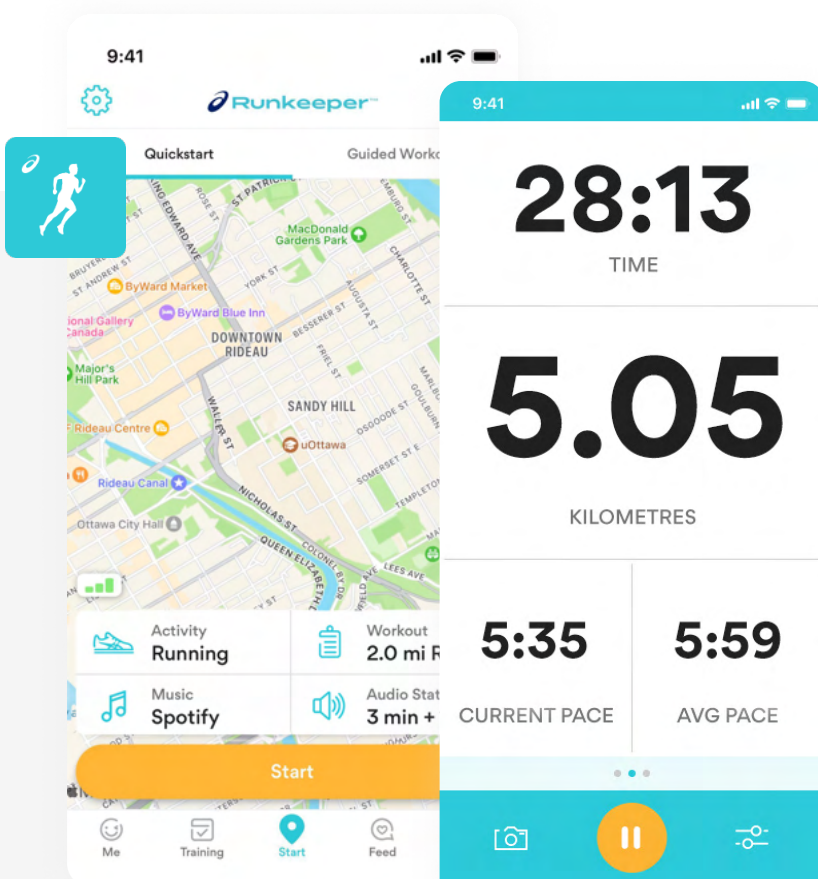
Choose a workout.

Set a distance, duration, or pace.
Or try one of our challenges.



Customize your audio cues.

Hear updates on your time, distance, or pace as you go.



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Goals

So, you want to run a 5k. First of all, congratulations. Signing up for a race means you made a commitment to show up and train, and we're excited to get you to the finish line. But before we get started, let's talk about goals—namely why you should have goals and how to set your own.

The importance of setting goals in running

Goal-setting in general has proven to have [immense benefits and power](#). Goals hold us accountable, give us purpose, and demand our concerted effort and commitment. They serve as a reward system—they reinforce positive habits and behaviors both while we're trying to accomplish them and after we accomplish them. Running goals, in particular, give us motivation and allow us to tailor our training to achieve the outcomes we want. Plus, they keep us going when we feel like giving up.

What to remember when setting your goals

1. Ask yourself: What is the motivating factor behind the goal?

Training can be difficult without a light at the end of the tunnel—and you choose the light, so make it something you actually care about! Your goal has to matter to YOU. Not anyone else. When your goal is truly meaningful, you're more likely to stay committed to pursuing it.

2. Be specific!

Goals should be specific in the sense that they're clear (so there's no confusion about what you're expecting of yourself) and quantifiable (able to be tracked and measured). The more specific the goal, the better directed your race training can be.

Examples could be: “I want to run a 5k in under 30 minutes,” or “I want to finish a 5k, period.” For your first goal, you would want to enroll in a training plan that prepares you to run that pace for 5k through a mixture of speed and endurance work. The second goal tells you that your training should focus on running consistently and progressively increasing your mileage until you can comfortably run a 5k. See, your goals inform your training!

3. Set multiple goals—some that are balanced and some that are big and scary.

We also recommend setting several “sub-goals” as well as different types of goals. Each runner should have a mix of performance-related and non-performance related goals, as well as balanced and “aim high” goals. You can share these goals with whomever you want, but keep in mind that negativity and doubt will not help you, so share your “big and scary” goals with those who will support and inspire you as you work towards them.



Let’s say your overarching goal is to run a 5k in under 30 minutes. Here’s what your goal spread could look like.

- Overarching goal: I want to run a 5k in under 30 minutes.
- Interim/sub goal: I want to run one kilometre in under 6 minutes.
- Aim high/big and scary goal: I’m going to strive to run this 5k in under 28 minutes, so 5:35 per km pace.
- Non-performance goal: I want to cross the finish line feeling happy and accomplished.
- Non-time related goal: I want to run a 5k without having to stop.

The purpose of setting multiple goals with various purposes is to strike a balance between challenging yourself and being realistic, and that you're content no matter what happens. No one wants to cross the finish line feeling like they have no reason to be proud of themselves, especially when finishing the race is reason enough to celebrate!

Note: When setting any goal, it's worth considering your current life situation. If you recently had a child, changed jobs, moved to a new home, or had another significant life event or stressor in your path, you may not be in the right headspace to run your fastest race ever. The key to a happy race experience is to reach high while still managing your expectations.



4. Learn from your last race.

For those who have run a 5k before—or really, any length race—your past experience should inform your upcoming race. You know how to train, what to wear, what to expect, and more—so use this insight to set your goals! Maybe you want to beat your previous time, stay injury-free throughout training, or you have a new health goal you're striving for. Our past performance in races can clue us in to what our goals can and should look like for subsequent races. They show us what we're capable of, and give us an idea of what's within reach.



5. Take it seriously, but don't forget to enjoy yourself.

Sometimes runners get so caught up in their time and performance that training makes them miserable and they start to dread it. Training for races (and running the race) can be demanding, but it should still be a net-positive, enjoyable experience! If you notice that running leaves you feeling discouraged or resentful, try taking a step back and reevaluating your goals.



Completion vs. performance-related goals

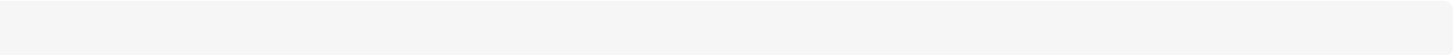
The goals you set for this 5k will depend on what you're looking to get out of it—and chances are, they'll primarily be completion or performance-related.

Setting Completion Goals

If you're relatively new to running, or haven't run many 5k races, your goal may be to finish the race and feel reasonably good at the end. Completion goals are ideal for beginners and runners who want to enjoy the race without added pressure, but they can work for anyone!

A completion goal can be a powerful motivator—you know you just have to cross the finish line; it doesn't have to be pretty. Runners who are hypercritical of their performance (to a point where a race isn't fun or “worth it” unless they beat their past times) can benefit from a completion goal, as it can take excess weight off their backs.

For completion goals, it's crucial to stick to your training plan and stay consistent with your recovery and nutrition. Running a race at any pace requires effort, and you want your body to be in good form on race day.



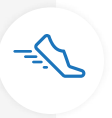
Setting performance goals

If you're an intermediate or advanced runner, your goals will probably be tied to your performance and time. This is assuming you've run a 5k—or a similar distance—before, and you have a log of your previous times (or at least, your baseline kilometre time).



Step 1: Set a realistic time goal.

To set a performance-related goal for your 5k, take a look at your training and time logs. You want to set a realistic and feasible time goal (aka if you've never run a 4:30 km before, you can't expect to run a 5k where you average 4:30 kms). Maybe this goal is a time you've done before or know you can run even on a bad day.



Step 2: Set a reach goal.

From there, you can set your “reach” goal—a time you're capable of hitting, but it will require a solid effort and everything falling into place on race day (nutrition, sleep, no injuries).



Step 3: Set a silent goal.

Last, set a “silent” goal. This is a strategy used by Coach Corinne, who is always encouraging her athletes to dream big. Your silent goal is one that you'd really have to believe in yourself and dig deep to achieve. A goal that would be exciting to hit, but that you aren't expecting to hit if the conditions aren't right.

Say that your realistic goal for your 5k is to run it in under 32 minutes (which would be about 6:20 per km pace). Your silent goal could be running it in under 29 minutes (about 5:45 per km pace). Shaving 45 seconds off your mile time (and maintaining that pace for 5k) wouldn't necessarily be an easy feat, but if the conditions were right—you slept well, the weather was great, your family showed up to watch you, and you felt that race day adrenaline—it's a time you may be able to pull off.

Once you land on your performance-based goals, make sure you have a way to track your progress. The [ASICS Runkeeper™ app](#) keeps a log of your mileage, split times, your post-run mood, and much more. Having these records makes it easy to monitor your improvement and stay on course to hit your goals.

Bottom line: Setting goals for yourself, whatever they are, can be immensely helpful as you train for your upcoming 5k. Be realistic, stay consistent, and if you fall off the wagon, catch up to it and keep going!



For more information on goal setting, check out these articles on the Runkeeper blog:

- [How To Set Realistic Running Goals \(And How To Achieve Them\)](#)
- [How To Set Running Goals You'll Actually Achieve](#)
- [How To Get Your Goals Back On Track](#)

Training

Training for a race, regardless of the distance, is like embarking on a journey. It requires preparation, time, and commitment—and at times, especially the beginning, that can feel daunting. Not everyone considers themselves a “runner,” and it’s easy to get discouraged if you’re new to running, or if your expectations of training don’t align with your reality.

That said, the hardest part of any training cycle is taking the first step—and we're here to make it easier for you. (And to be clear, if you get out to run, you're a runner. It's that simple.)

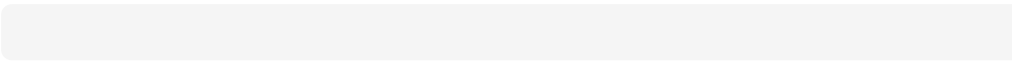
Here's how to get started with training for your 5k race.

Step 1: Get your hands on the right training plan.

When looking for a training plan, [there are certain criteria you should keep in mind](#) (and questions you should ask yourself before starting it).

The first is the source. Where is this training plan coming from? Who wrote it? Have other runners completed it? You want a training plan that's been created or approved by an expert, like a certified running coach or professional runner. The more experts that endorse the plan—and runners that have seen success with it—the better.

Second, you want a plan that is realistic for you. Many training programs are generic in the sense that they're created with the "average" beginner, intermediate, or expert runner in mind. They're designed to appeal to a large number of runners, but on the flip side, they're not tailored to your specific schedule, your lifestyle, or even your fitness level. A training plan that's customized for you is ideal.



Third, choose a program that keeps you accountable and allows you to grow—a plan that feels both rewarding and fulfilling, and lets you track your progress. A poorly designed program may rush you into long runs before you're ready, give you workouts without explanation, or overwhelm you with its length and complexity. To us, that's a hard pass.

Your training program is at the crux of your race experience, so it's important to find a plan that you can trust and commit to. And while there's a slew of training plans out there that you can spend time sifting through, we recommend downloading the [Runkeeper app](#) and checking out our individualized race training plans.



When you sign up for the Runkeeper app, you'll choose your race distance, input your race date, and then answer some questions about your preferences. How many days a week are you able to train? What is your goal race time, if you have one? Each of our plans are built to fit the training requirement of your race distance, and we're always updating them based on feedback from our coaches and runners like you.

To get access to our 5k training plans, download the Runkeeper app and start our free [90-day Runkeeper Go trial!](#)

Step 2: Manage your expectations —training is hard work!

It's common for runners to go into training bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, but training isn't all sunshine and rainbows. It's rewarding and exciting, but still, it requires serious effort! There will be plenty of ups and downs—you'll have days where your run doesn't go as planned, you don't want to run, or you miss a scheduled run because something unexpected comes up. The key to making it through your training is to manage your expectations.

What you can expect to happen during your training

(Hint: You will get through these.)

- **You probably won't adhere to your training program 100 percent of the time.** That's okay! Listen to your body—when you don't, you open the door for injuries and burnout.
- **There will be days when you don't want to run.** Even professional runners have days like these. You'll learn ways to stay motivated in the Motivation section of this guide. Some days getting out there for a walk will be enough to keep up your motivation.
- **There will also be days when the weather isn't ideal.** You can't control what happens outside, but you can control whether or not you lace up and go for it. [More tips on handling unpredictable conditions here.](#)
- **You may get injured, or deal with new aches and pains.** Running is physically taxing, and your body may not be used to this level of work. You'll read more on how to deal with this in the Injuries section.
- **You will want to compare yourself to other runners.** This is a slippery slope, and rarely is it productive. Stay focused on your end goal not someone else's.

“

Truth is: Training is not a piece of cake. It's a challenge with a worthwhile reward. You get out of the experience what you put into it, and if you're consistent through the good times and bad times alike, you will be successful.

Step 3:

Learn to love the process.

Race training is made up of many parts—from your pre-run warmups and stretches to your long runs and workouts. Our advice is to learn to love each part. Race day is only one day—the bulk of your experience is the time you put into training. We become so focused on the destination (the finish line) that we forget to appreciate and enjoy the journey. Take the time during training to acknowledge your consistent effort, discipline, and positive mindset. Be proud of your hard work, and let it push you further. There will be ebbs and flows at various points along the way, but if you stay patient and consistent, you'll be prepared on race day.





Step 4:

Run like the wind!

Now you have the knowledge and tools you need to literally hit the ground running. Select a training plan, level your expectations, immerse yourself in the process, and then get yourself out the door! At the end of the day, you only have to start. Put one foot in front of the other, believe in yourself, and let go of perfection. Training isn't easy, but it's the winding roads, ups and downs, and challenges and successes that make you not only a better runner, but a more resilient, strong-willed, and driven individual.

Gear

Before you can start training for a road race, you have to get your hands on some running gear. Now, it may seem straightforward—you only need sneakers and headphones, right?—but your gear plays a major role in your performance, both during your training and on race day itself.

So before you jump in, you'll need a few things...

Disclaimer: All recommendations in this section are the writer's individual opinion and do not represent the opinion of any entity whatsoever.

Shoes

Running shoes are an important piece of any runner's attire. Before you choose a shoe, it's important to understand your stride. Each running shoe has a different level of cushioning and support and is designed for a specific kind of runner. Consult an expert at your local running store.

In terms of foot strike (the way your foot hits the ground), runners tend to fall into one of three categories: [overpronation, underpronation, or neutral](#). Overpronation (common in people with low arches or flat feet) means your foot tends to roll inward when you run. Underpronation (common in people with high arches) means your foot tends to roll outward. If you're a neutral runner with normal pronation, that means the force and impact of your foot striking the ground is equally distributed.

While none of these types of pronation are inherently "bad," knowing which category you fall under can help you choose the right running shoe and, in turn, reduce the risk of injury.

For overpronators...

Overpronators typically feel great in shoes with added stability, heel cushioning, and a firm midsole. The ASICS [GEL-KAYANO® 28](#) and [GT-2000™ 10](#), for example, are designed for overpronation—so runners wearing these can expect their shoe and stride to stay stable and consistent throughout their runs.



GEL-KAYANO® 28



GT-2000™ 10

For underpronators...

Underpronators usually opt for shoes with extra cushioning (like the [GEL-NIMBUS® 23](#), [NOVABLAST™ 2](#), or [GEL-CUMULUS® 23](#)), as they want to minimize the impact their foot feels when they run.



GEL-NIMBUS® 23



NOVABLAST™ 2



GEL-CUMULUS® 23

For neutral runners...

Neutral pronators can wear a variety of shoes and often choose either neutral cushioned shoes or natural running shoes, like the [GLIDERIDE™ 2](#) or [DYNABLAST 2™](#). (You don't have to remember all of this, by the way, it's all in our [Pronation Guide](#).)



GLIDERIDE™ 2



DYNABLAST 2™

Nowadays, many running stores have experts on staff who can assess your stride and assist you. Many stores even have treadmills or let you take a quick jog around to give you a sense of how the shoes will feel in action. We encourage you to visit your local running store to meet with a shoe specialist, or use our [Shoe Finder](#)! Bells and whistles aside, you need a shoe that's comfortable for you when you run (and you should replace them every 300 to 500 miles, or four to six months).

Socks

We cannot say this enough: DO NOT SKIMP ON SOCKS. Yes, it's tempting to throw on whatever you have in your drawer, but we're telling you now, that's a mistake. Why? Because everyday life socks are made of cotton, and cotton is kind of a runner's worst enemy.

Cotton absorbs moisture, and when you mix that moisture with the heat and friction your feet generate when you run, you're setting yourself up for painful blisters, calluses, and hot spots. Instead, look for socks made of synthetic fibers, like polyester, spandex, and nylon—anything non-cotton is better than cotton. These fibers are moisture-wicking, meaning when they get wet, they don't stay wet. Moisture-wicking socks will keep your feet as dry as possible, which is crucial for avoiding blisters. We also recommend socks with heel tabs for anyone prone to heel blisters. With socks, it's important to train with them leading up to race day to avoid any unsavory surprises.

Bottom line: Invest in socks. Moisture-wicking socks made of anything but cotton, like [UNISEX NIMBUS PLUS™ single tab](#), and [UNISEX PERFORMANCE 2 NO SHOW](#), and [MEN'S CUSHION™ QUARTER](#).



UNISEX NIMBUS PLUS™
single tab



UNISEX PERFORMANCE 2 NO
SHOW



MEN'S CUSHION QUARTER

Tops & bottoms

The clothes you choose to run in will depend heavily on several factors: the temperature, your body type, and your personal preference.

Dressing for temperature can be a little tricky, because your body will heat up as you run. In general when choosing what to wear, add 10 to 15 degrees to whatever the temperature is outside. That's what it'll actually feel like once you're running (the "Real Feel," if you will).



Here are a few general guidelines to consider when selecting your running outfit:

When it's below 0 degrees, you'll probably need...

- [A tank top](#) or [short sleeve shirt](#) base layer, [a long sleeve shirt](#), and [a cold weather running jacket](#). [A vest](#) would also suffice, if you prefer that to a jacket
- [Full-length running tights](#). (Your ankles will get cold if you don't cover them, trust us.)
- Make sure your feet, ears, head, and hands are covered. That means wearing [gloves](#), [a headband](#), and/or [a hat](#)
- As always, wear [good quality, moisture-wicking socks](#)

For temperatures in the 5 to 10 degree range...

- A base layer and an outer layer (e.g. a tank top and long sleeve shirt or [zip-up jacket](#))
- Full-length running tights (or shorter if you tend to run hot)
- Optional gloves

When it's 10 to 15 degrees outside, you may want to wear...

- A [t-shirt](#) and tights ([full-length](#) or [capri](#)) OR [shorts](#) with a long-sleeve shirt
- For cold runners, a long sleeve and tights will work, too.

15 to 20 degrees, opt for...

- A short sleeve running shirt or [tank top](#)
- Running shorts or capris
- Optional long sleeve or longer tights for those who run cold

For anything 20 to 25 degrees...

- A tank top
- Running shorts or capris (preferably with mesh so they're breathable)

Now, for 25 degrees and up...

- You're going to want clothes that are very lightweight and breathable.
- A tank top and shorts, both made of synthetic materials that wick moisture
- And hey, if you want to run in [a sports bra](#) or shirtless, go for it!

Running gear for women

For women, finding [supportive sports bras](#) and [moisture-wicking clothing](#) should be a priority. (Again, you'll want to avoid cotton.) Keeping a selection of long and short sleeve shirts, tank tops, shorts, and running tights or leggings on hand will help you be ready for any temperature. [A rain jacket designed for runners](#) is also a wise:

Try on running clothes in-store, if you can, or order from a site with free returns. Shorts, leggings, and sports bras, in particular, come in tons of different sizes, lengths, and styles, and some will be more comfortable for your body type than others.

Running gear for men

Men should also seek out [moisture-wicking clothes](#) including short and long sleeve shirts, tank tops, and even singlets (many competitive male runners like this fit). In terms of shorts, men can opt for either shorts with netting (which is essentially built-in underwear) or shorts without netting, worn with spandex shorts underneath. Men's running shorts also come in a variety of lengths and styles—no one length or style is “better” than the other, it's simply about personal comfort. For colder temps, tights are a worthwhile option and can be worn under running shorts.



Essential accessories

Now that you have the necessary equipment to get yourself to the starting line, it's time to figure out if you need any “essential accessories.” These are items that address any issues you run into during your training—aka products or gear that make you more comfortable when you run and/or keep your body safe.

For example, some runners experience chafing—when skin repeatedly rubs against clothing or other skin, causing friction and irritation—on their inner thighs, buttocks, groins, nipples, feet, or armpits. The result is usually a rash of small red bumps. If you start to notice that certain parts of your body chafe during your training, you'll want to add an anti-chafing balm or Vaseline to your list of running gear. Chafing is painful and needs time to heal—and if it's happening during training, you can expect it on race day. It's beneficial to be prepared!

Other essentials could include sunscreen (to avoid sunburn), [a running buff](#) (to use as a mask, if needed), sunglasses (to keep the sun out of your eyes), or prescription orthotics (to decrease foot pain).

Anything that solves a problem you're having, consider it an essential accessory.



ASICS FACE GAITER

“Nice to have” extras

Once you've decided on your running attire and secured other necessities, it's worth asking yourself: “Do I have what I need to start training?” Fundamentally, the answer is yes—you now have what you need to run safely—but we're unique human beings with our own preferences, and sometimes extra running gear can make the training and race experience more enjoyable.

Examples of “nice to have” extras:

A GPS running watch

It isn't a necessity in the sense that you can run without one. But for someone who wants to track their distance and keep a log of their runs, it can be a useful tool (although, the [Runkeeper app](#) will do that for you, too).



PERFORMANCE CAP

A hat

Some runners like wearing a hat to keep sun and rain out of their eyes and sweat and hair out of their face. Hats aren't for everyone, it's personal preference!

[View performance cap](#)

A handheld water bottle

There are usually water stations throughout races, but if it comforts you to know that you have it and don't have to stop for water, then bring one along!



It's awesome if you know what your needs are upfront (you like seeing your data afterwards, love listening to music, etc.), but if you don't, that's okay, you'll find out as you start training!

Recs from our coaches

Choosing your running gear will be a very personal experience, and you have to go with what works well for you. But it never hurts to get a little input from the experts. Here are a few items our coaches never run without.

Advanced GPS Watch

Nearly all of our coaches said that they use an advanced GPS running watch for their training. In addition to distance-tracking, pace, heart rate, and daily steps, advanced watches offer features such as a compass, elevation tracking, stride length, training load insights, and more. If you need help staying accountable and like to see your running and daily activity stats, this is a solid choice.



MAGIC SPEED™

SPEED SERIES™

For speed work and harder workouts, our coaches love the SPEED SERIES™. Designed for racing or regular training runs, the SPEED SERIES™ offers the versatility you need to move your body and your mind towards a new personal best. Made to propel your foot forward, GUIDESOLE™ technology creates a smooth rolling sensation as you move through your stride. By stacking the midsole with FF BLAST™ cushioning, this series has a responsive feel to your step while keeping the shoe lightweight.

[Show SPEED SERIES™](#)

Wireless headphones or earbuds

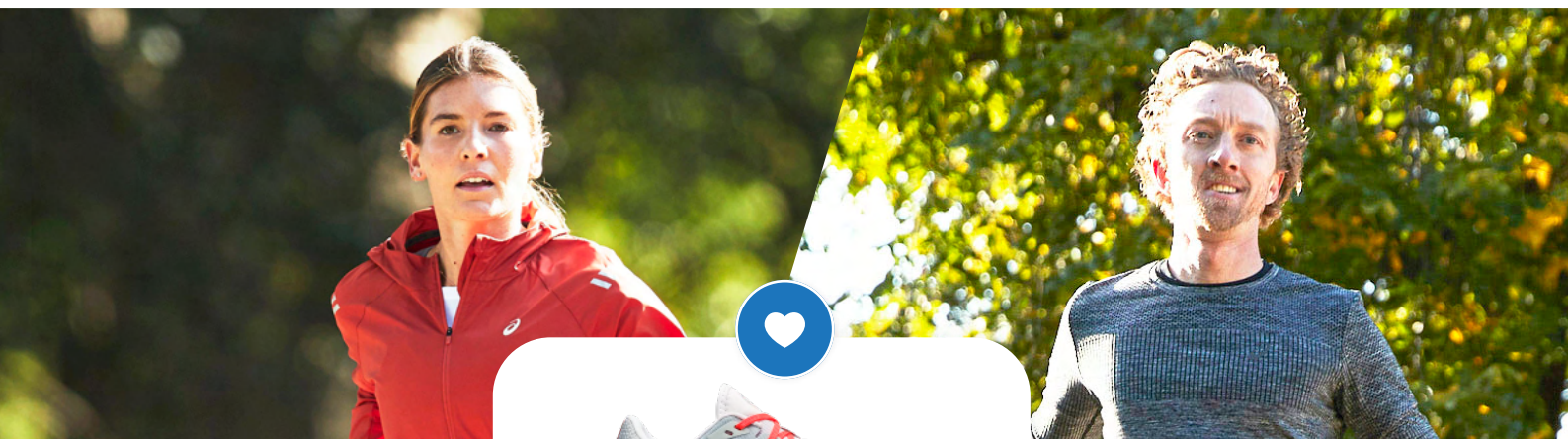
Coach Corinne says these headphones have been a game changer for her runs. Wireless headphones in general are a smart choice for runners—cords and wires can get tangled up while you're running, and syncing your headphones to your phone via Bluetooth means you even don't have to hold your phone (you can put it in an armband, a hip belt, etc.).



CORINNE

Easy mileage shoes

Each coach has their own go-to shoe for logging weekly mileage while race training. Coaches Jess Movold and Justin Ross love the [DYNABLAST™ 2](#), because they're comfortable and lightweight for easy runs, while Yusuf Jeffers and Holly Rush favor the [GLIDERIDE™ 2](#). Each running shoe is designed for specific types of running, so it's worth looking at all the options and narrowing your search based on your needs. For stability and cushioning, check out the [GLIDERIDE™2](#), [GEL-KAYANO® 28](#), and [GEL-NIMBUS®23](#).

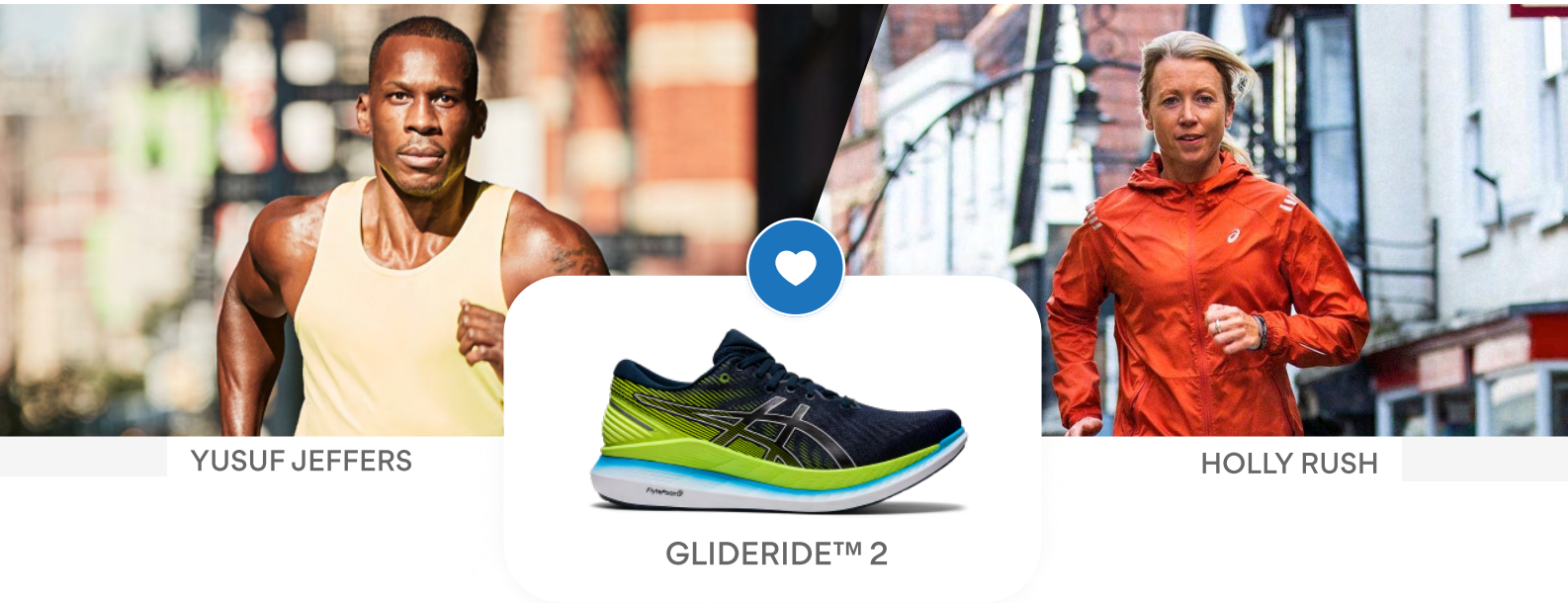


JESS MOVOLD

JUSTIN ROSS



DYNABLAST™ 2



YUSUF JEFFERS

GLIDERIDE™ 2

HOLLY RUSH



GEL-KAYANO® 28



GEL-NIMBUS® 23

And if you feel overwhelmed by all the options, head over to our [Shoe Finder](#) to find your perfect match.

Injuries

We can't talk about running, or really any form of exercise, without talking about injuries. Running places a high demand on our bodies—it requires a large number of our muscles and bones to function in specific ways—which means there is room for error and injury.

Injuries are unpredictable and sometimes inevitable (even the healthiest of individuals get injured), but there are measures you can take to minimize your risk of injury, and ways to heal injuries that can speed up your recovery. We asked Runkeeper's resident physical therapist and long-time runner Rachel Tavel, PT, DPT, CSCS, for her advice on staying injury-free throughout race training.



RACHEL TAVEL

Doctor of Physical Therapy,
Certified Strength and
Conditioning Specialist, &
Avid Runner

How to reduce the risk of injury when training for a race (and how to avoid overtraining)

The majority of running injuries come from overtraining—so an effective way to avoid injuries is to pace yourself. Overtraining (always training and not giving your body adequate time to recover) can be avoided by adhering to a custom training plan, taking rest days, and listening to your body. That may sound cliché, but your body is pretty self-aware—if you pay close attention to it, you'll know when you're fine and when you should scale back.

In general, preventing injuries boils down to four principles:

1. Slow & Steady:

Ramp up your training gradually and mindfully

2. Stretch & Strengthen:

Support your increases in mileage with a proper stretching and strengthening regimen

3. Eat & Recover:

Include proper nutrition and recovery strategies

4. Check In:

Stay aware and tuned-in to your body



What these principles look like in action

When you sign up for a race, it can be easy to jump into your training feeling eager and overzealous—which can lead to you taking on too much, way too fast. That’s why adhering to an expert-approved training plan is so essential. Strength training plays a role in preventing injuries, as it provides a more solid and stable foundation for building mileage. Rachel Tavel, PT, DPT, CSCS, recommends incorporating core, glute, and lower extremity strengthening exercises, with a particular focus on the glute muscles, which are critical for single-leg stability and power when running.

For a 5k in particular, your training should focus on power, in addition to distance and endurance. To do this, make sure you’re adding plyometrics and some speed training into your workouts—this will target the calf and hip muscles and help you increase your speed.

Also, *training runs* should be *prefaced* with a warm-up, like dynamic stretching and a few minutes of slow and steady jogging. Taking these measures to tailor your training will ultimately decrease your risk of injury, as your body will be better prepared for whatever happens on race day.

The chances of you getting injured will never be zero (there's always some risk), but if you take the right precautions, you can increase your chances of avoiding them!

How to properly recover between runs

Another mistake runners often make is thinking that the more time they spend running, the more prepared they'll be for the race. They cut back on their recovery time, and before you know it, they're nursing an overtraining injury. To be clear: It doesn't matter if this is your first 5k or your fiftieth—your body needs time to recover and rest between runs to avoid injury and burn out.

To properly recover between runs, focus on getting eight hours of sleep, stretching after your runs, eating enough protein (see Nutrition section), and taking rest days. Our Runkeeper 5k Training Plans have rest days built into them and are customized for your specific schedule, race date, and goals. There's no glory in skipping rest days and working your body into the ground.



While resting might not sound like the best way to get stronger and faster, it truly is an important element of training. Rest allows your body to adapt to new workloads and come back strong and more capable of handling the increased workload. It's necessary for building muscle strength and endurance, but it's also important for general health, and both physical and mental well-being.

Many long-time runners have developed their own recovery routines, employing techniques like self massage and foam rolling, as well as ice baths and muscle relief balms. Here are a few tips from Runkeeper coach Alain Saint-Dic on how to recover throughout race training.



ALAIN

Coach

3 recovery strategies from Coach Alain

1. Hydration
2. Mobility and flexibility
3. Self myofascial release

Hydration should be your top priority—not just from a dry-lipped, parched point of view. By staying hydrated, you increase the efficiency of nice, fluid blood transport throughout the body. This means more oxygen and nutrients for your muscles and joints, and better circulation while you're training and racing.

Runners should focus on a combination of **mobility and flexibility**. When thinking about mobility, think about maintaining an optimal range of motion and movement in the joints. I love anything that opens up the hips and prevents the lower back from tightening up as you run: 90/90's, T-spine openers, World's greatest stretch, and banded hip distractions. For flexibility, keep in mind that the body works as one unit, made of many parts. Isolated stretches for tight body parts don't usually produce optimal results. Always make time for a full-body stretch. Target your hip flexors, quads, hamstrings, lower back, calves, lats, and neck. The top cost-effective technique for "static" stretching is contract release or PNF stretching.

In terms of recovery tools, my favourite portable one is a lacrosse ball. It's an inexpensive and effective piece of equipment that's easy to bring with you wherever you go. I use it in place of my foam roller for self myofascial release. I find it gets deeper into your muscles because of the smaller surface area.

Aside from these techniques, you want to make sure you're getting enough sleep (typically eight hours per night) and eating a well-rounded, high-quality diet (see Nutrition section). And if you find you're experiencing a lot of pain between runs, don't hesitate to see a physical therapist or sports medicine specialist—sometimes we need a bit of hands-on work to keep our bodies running at full capacity.

How much rest time should you take between runs?

How much rest time you take between runs depends on your goals, your fitness level, and how long your race is. The amount of rest needed while training for a 5k can vary, but it's usually less than longer races like a 10k, half marathon, or marathon.

For casual and novice runners...

Casual runners will generally need less rest than runners who are training more vigorously. Generally, three to four runs per week with one to two rest days and cross-training days is a good place to start for novices and casual runners—but listen to your body and see what works for you!

For intermediate to advanced runners...

For most runners, having one to two rest days per week is sufficient, but more intermediate and advanced runners may find it comfortable to run low mileage runs once a day.



Everyone's body will react differently to various types of training, and if you incorporate intense strength, power, and endurance training into your routine, you may need to take extra rest, and that's okay! There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to rest—besides that, you have to do it—so as long as you're balancing the time you spend running with rest and recovery, you're golden.

How to deal with soreness, fatigue, and exhaustion

At various times throughout your 5k training, you'll inevitably experience soreness, fatigue, and exhaustion. Don't worry, this is all par for the course!

Soreness occurs after we exercise at a vigorous intensity (at a level above our body's current fitness level). When we exercise at this level, we create microscopic tears in our muscles, which our body repairs while we sleep, take rest days, etc. This muscle repair process is part of our body's overall adaptation—when we put stress on the body (in this case running), it adapts and becomes stronger in order to accommodate and handle that stress. But while it does that, we feel soreness, and soreness usually lasts a few days.

Soreness usually peaks two days post-activity and then tapers off in the days following. Each runner encounters sore muscles at one point or another, but it's very common for new runners, runners who are coming back from a hiatus, and runners who are pushing their pace or distance.

A few quick tips for minimizing soreness:



1. Eat protein after your run or workout, ideally within 60 minutes of finishing is recommended — 10 to 20 grams for females, 30 to 40 grams for men. Our body uses amino acids from protein to repair muscle damage.



2. Warm up before your runs and stretch after them. Runners are prone to developing tight hamstrings, calves, and quadriceps, so you should always warm up before your run and stretch out afterward. Hint: There are warm-up routines in the Training section!



3. Avoid doing too much too fast. Once you get into a rhythm with race training, it can be tempting to jump ahead and take on more—but that can cause you some serious soreness. Our training plans are designed to meet you where you are in your running journey and build your strength, endurance, and stamina enough to run a 5k.

As for fatigue and exhaustion, these are clear signs from your body that you need to slow down or take a break. Fatigue is less extreme than exhaustion, and can be remedied by easing up on your running routine (read: slowing down, shortening your run, etc.), or replacing a run with a cross-training session. Exhaustion, though, implies that your body has depleted its reserves and something is missing: the basic nutrition, hydration, or strength to complete your workout. To deal with exhaustion, consider hydrating, eating well-balanced, nutritious meals, and giving your body what it needs, whether that's a good stretch, sleep, or a light recovery walk. Whatever you do, don't ignore your body's signals. Resting and recovering now will help you remain healthy throughout your training and help you have effective and successful workouts once you return to your plan.

Common injuries + what to do if they happen

The majority of running injuries occur from the waist down—think feet, legs, and hips—and are either muscular or skeletal. Overtraining is a common cause, but other factors like having unsupportive running shoes, running on different surfaces, and having overly tight muscles can lead to injuries, too.

Below, we outline eight of the most common running injuries and great ways to avoid them.

Shin splints

What it is

Runners with shin splints will feel a splintering pain down the front of one or both shin bones. This injury is often due to overtraining, but shin splints can also develop in runners who frequently run on different surfaces.

How to avoid it

In addition to increasing your mileage gradually, try to run on similar surfaces as much as possible. Running on concrete, for example, is much harder on the body than, say, running on grass or astroturf. If you're frequently switching from concrete to grass, to treadmill, to hard-packed dirt, and so on, you could be at risk for shin splints. Otherwise, make sure you're resting between runs and have a supportive pair of running shoes.

Plantar fasciitis

What it is

If you're suffering from incessant pain on the bottom of your foot near your heel, you could have plantar fasciitis. This condition has a number of possible causes and can go away on its own, but for some, it can last months without treatment. That said, it's never

a bad idea to see a physical therapist or orthopedic doctor for medical advice (which we would recommend for any of these injuries).

How to avoid it

Wearing adequate running shoes and stretching your hip flexors, calves, and hamstrings before and after your runs can help keep plantar fasciitis at bay. Runners with high arches or flat feet should also consider getting orthotics for added support.

Stress fracture

What it is

Stress fractures are another type of overuse injury and are caused by repetitive stress on our bones. By definition, stress fractures are tiny cracks in a bone that results from repeated force or loading, and they usually occur when a part of the body is overstressed and overloaded before proper strength and training adjustments have been made. Stress fractures are serious, painful injuries, and can take two months or more to heal, depending on severity.

How to avoid it

Easing your way into running and progressing your mileage and speed over time will decrease your risk of getting injured, including stress fractures. Also, you should be replacing your running shoes every 500 to 800 kilometers, or every four to six months, depending on how often you run.

Runner's knee

What it is

The term “[runner's knee](#)” has come to represent any pain around the front of the kneecap. This includes pain felt when walking, running, doing squats, or going down a set of stairs. Runner's knee tends to be an overuse injury, but can also come from foot problems like flat feet or weak quadriceps.

How to avoid it

Avoiding hard surfaces like concrete, wearing not-too-old running shoes with enough support, and keeping your thigh muscles strong are a few ways to prevent runner's knee. If you suspect you're already dealing with it, an effective course of action is to consistently stretch and strengthen your hamstrings, glutes, and quadriceps.

Iliotibial (IT) Band Syndrome

What it is

IT Band Syndrome is another overuse injury common in long-distance runners. Symptoms include intense pain on the outside of the knee, which is caused by the repetitive bending and straightening of the knee during activities like running and biking.

How to avoid it

IT Band Syndrome often arises when there is a weakness instability elsewhere in the body, so keeping your other muscles, like your hip muscles, strong is key for preventing it. Warming up before your runs, easing into your training plan, keeping your muscles stretched and limber, and regularly replacing your running shoes will also ward off ITBS.

Mild sprained ankle

What it is

A sprained ankle occurs when one or more of the ligaments surrounding the ankle joint are stretched or torn. Some sprains are severe—meaning a ligament is torn or ruptured—while others are relatively minor and result in mild pain and swelling.

How to avoid it

In addition to warming up before runs, wearing supportive shoes, and slowly progressing in your training, you can avoid spraining your ankle by strengthening the muscles and tendons in your lower body—specifically your ankles, feet, calves, and quadriceps. Practicing single-leg balancing exercises and writing the ABCs in the air with your foot while seated will improve your ankle stability and reduce your risk of an ankle injury.

Hamstring strain

What it is

Hamstring strains tend to happen when a runner is overstriding or sprinting too hard without having warmed up. This overload on the hamstring can cause it to tear, leaving you with a sharp pain that makes running (and sometimes even walking) difficult. Most strains are mild but can worsen if not cared for.

How to avoid it

Getting a solid warm-up before your run primes your muscles for the work you're about to do, thereby decreasing your chances of a hamstring strain. Also, lightly stretching and foam rolling after your run will alleviate any built-up tightness in your hamstring and promote much-needed blood flow to help heal any injured tissue.

Hip pain

What it is

Hip pain is often caused by limitations in either strength or mobility of the hip—and it can be felt at the front, side, or back of the hip. Sometimes hip pain presents as a dull ache or a clicking/popping sensation, and other times it's more of soreness or tightness.

How to avoid it

There are a million reasons why your hip can hurt, so it's crucial to take multiple precautions when trying to refrain from injuring it. Many runners have tight hip muscles, so it's wise to do stretches like a figure-four stretch, knee to chest stretch, and kneeling lunge stretch to loosen your hip flexors, hip extensors, and hip rotators. Similarly, strengthening your hips will lessen your chance of hip pain, and for that, we recommend doing clamshells, side-lying abduction, lateral and monster walking, or single-leg stability drills.

The bottom line is whenever you feel pain—in your foot, your leg, your hip, anywhere—take a step back and try to assess what's wrong. If the pain goes beyond soreness, you could be injured or on the brink of an injury, and it's a good idea to pause your training, rest, and see a doctor. No one wants to spend time and energy training for a race, only to be sidelined by an injury they could have sidestepped.

What to do if you miss a run or your schedule changes

Regardless of the fact that you signed up for a race, you're still a human being, with a schedule, conflicts, commitments, and limited energy. Even very fit, dedicated runners sometimes have to skip a training run or fit it in at another time. Which is to say: It's okay, it happens.

In the event that you miss a run during your training, it's a good idea to skip it and continue with your plan as written. Obviously, you don't want to skip training runs left and right (if that happens, it's a sign that you should review your schedule and see how you can adjust), but missing one run will not invalidate your training. Stick to the plan as closely as you can, increase your mileage slowly,

and take your recovery seriously. If you can do that, you'll be ready on race day.

Also, many races allow you to upgrade or downgrade distances based on how your training is going, check their policies and timelines in case you need to make a change.



For more on injuries and fitting runs into your schedule, check out these articles on our Runkeeper blog:

- [How To Stay In Shape And Avoid Injury](#)
- [How To Avoid Common Running Injuries](#)

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Nutrition

If there's one universal truth in this world, it's that everyone loves to eat. And like most activities, running requires energy, which means we need fuel for it—aka we have to eat!

Learning to “eat like a runner” is a crucial part of the race training journey and a truly enjoyable part at that! In this section, you’ll glean valuable advice from Runkeeper nutrition expert Cara Schrager, MPH, RD, LDN, CDE, and master the art of race training nutrition.



CARA SCHRAGER

Registered Dietician &
Avid Runner

A brief introduction to nutrition for 5k runners

Running is a sport that uses a significant amount of energy. Since we store energy in limited amounts, we need to fuel our bodies with macronutrients—for runners, primarily carbohydrates, but fats and proteins as well. Nutrition is important for runners because not only does it provide our bodies with fuel for each stride, but helps to repair any damage that may occur. The 5k race is a short enough race that what you eat prior will not necessarily make or break your performance however, building a solid nutrition foundation for training will help you become a stronger runner.

What you should eat prior to 5k training runs will depend on many factors including the length, intensity, and duration of your run. Runs under 30 minutes may not require any additional fuel beforehand, because our bodies have glycogen stores that break down into glucose for energy. However, it's never a bad idea to provide your body with additional energy before a run. Here's how to properly fuel yourself before your training runs and on race day.

How to eat throughout your race training

What to eat before your training runs

Whether you're a new or seasoned runner, training for a 5k will always require fuel! Before training runs, you should primarily eat carbohydrate-dense foods.

Carbohydrates are macronutrients, and when we digest them, they get converted to glucose (blood sugar). Glucose feeds our cells and gives us energy for our runs!

Carbohydrates are found in grains, fruits, milk products, beans, and starchy vegetables like peas, corn and potatoes. Even though all carbohydrates eventually get converted into glucose in our body, not all carbohydrates act the same way in the body. Before your runs, you should aim to eat the types of carbohydrates that are easy and quick to digest.

Some examples of pre-run fuel for a short run (less than 30 minutes) could be...

- A banana
- A granola bar

And for longer runs (30 minutes or more)...

- 1 cup cooked quick oats with a banana
- 1 slice of whole wheat toast with 1 TBSP peanut butter and 1 TBSP jelly
- 1 fruit smoothie with frozen berries and yogurt

Nutrition is very individualized, so with practice and training, you'll find out the right amount of pre-run fuel for you.

Foods to avoid before training runs

Before a run, you should avoid foods that take longer to digest like fats, proteins, and high fiber carbohydrates. Otherwise, you may end up with stomach cramping, bloating, or discomfort during your run.

So, here's a shortlist of foods to avoid:

- Vegetables, nuts and seeds, beans, and other high fibre foods
- High fat foods like fatty meats, cheeses, nut butter (this is fine in small quantities), and avocados
- Large quantities of protein-packed foods like eggs, meat, and dairy



How *much* you eat before a run depends on your body size and the length or amount of time you will spend running. For example, you will want to eat more carbohydrates before a long run as compared to a short run, which only requires a snack. It's recommended that you should eat about an hour to two hours before a run to let your body properly digest the food you consumed.

What to eat after your training runs

Eating after a run is important for several reasons—namely because eating helps replenish your lost glycogen stores and repair muscle damage. It has been shown that eating a 3:1 ratio of carbs to protein is effective for optimal recovery, in addition to eating within a window of 30 to 45 minutes after a run.



One example of a suitable post-run snack is chocolate milk, which provides the optimal ratio of carbohydrates to protein. Because it's a liquid, it doesn't take long to digest, meaning it can aid in a speedy recovery. A larger post-run snack example may be a vanilla greek yogurt with berries, 1 TBSP chia seeds or walnuts, and ¼ cup granola. The amount you should eat after a run will depend on the length of your run. For convenience, you can time your runs around breakfast, lunch, or dinnertime so you can recover with a meal, but if that doesn't work with your schedule, you can plan to have a snack.

What to eat in general while training

In general, runners should be mindful of their nutrition throughout training. It's important to eat a variety of foods—that way, you can make sure you're getting the nutrients you need. Training for a 5k race is a great opportunity to see how certain foods impact your energy levels, performance, and recovery as a runner.

Throughout your training, you should...

- **Try to “eat the rainbow”** by choosing colorful fruits and vegetables and incorporating them throughout the day.
- **Pair fruits and vegetables with lean proteins** like seafood, skinless poultry, and lean cuts of meat in addition to plant based proteins like beans, tofu, and legumes.
- **Aim to eat a variety of carbohydrates** within each carb category: whole grains, legumes, fruits, vegetables, and dairy.

Between your runs...

- **Aim to include a protein source at every meal.** This will help you maintain satiety (read: not be hungry all the time) and help your body rebuild your muscles. As you increase your mileage during training, you'll inevitably start to get hungrier after runs. Eating protein with meals will make sure that you are satisfied after a meal and don't overeat.

When you're not running

- **Strive to eat a variety of high fiber carbohydrates** like whole grains, fruit, and vegetables (just not right before a run!).
- **Try to limit highly processed foods, high sodium foods, and foods high in saturated fats.** These foods can increase inflammation and provide no nutritional benefits.



What to eat on race day (and the night before)

What to eat the day and night before the race

The night before a race should include a meal that has been tried and true. Nothing new! Your meal should include carbohydrates like rice, pasta, bread, or potatoes. That said, be careful not to overdo the quantity of food—you don't want to go to bed feeling uncomfortably full. There's also no need to "carb-load" the night before a 5k race. Eating reasonable portions of healthy carbohydrates (fruit, yogurt, whole grains) throughout the day and a carb-centric meal at night will be enough.

Another note: Make sure to stay hydrated by drinking a lot of water in the days leading up to the race. However, the evening before the race, avoid drinking excessive amounts of water—going to the bathroom multiple times during the night will disrupt your sleep. Aim to avoid alcohol before the race, too, as it could increase your risk of dehydration.



What to eat the day of your race

For any race, it's recommended to eat about 2 hours before the race to allow yourself enough time to properly digest the meal. Since the 5k is a shorter distanced race, a light amount of fuel beforehand should do the trick. Plan to eat a breakfast with easily digestible carbohydrates like an english muffin or two pieces of toast with a light spread of peanut butter and jelly or honey. Sip on water before your race, and stop to hydrate at water stations during the race if you need it!



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Motivation

Motivation tips

- **Start by setting a solid goal.** Find your “why” and refer back to it when you feel unmotivated.
- **Take time to self-reflect.** Look inward and think through what motivates you most, whether that’s competition, community, or something else entirely.
- **Focus on developing good running habits.** Motivation is fleeting—but habits, when practiced and solidified, can help you make the most of any training program, no matter how you feel.
- **Find an easy way to stay accountable.** Grab a journal or download the Runkeeper app, knock out your runs, and celebrate small wins throughout your training.
- **Don’t go at it alone!** Find a running buddy or accountability partner (possibly someone with similar goals) you can count on when your motivation is low.

Now that you’re prepared to pick clothes, train, and eat, it’s time to talk about how to stay motivated. Regardless of your experience level as a runner, there will always be moments when you don’t feel like running, or when you want to give up altogether. Those feelings are normal, and they aren’t signs that you should throw in the towel. Rather, they’re a sign that you need reinforcements.

Here’s our advice for sustaining motivation throughout race training.

Start by setting a solid goal.

Runkeeper coaches agree that staying motivated is much easier when you have a clear “why.” You have to get clear on what the real intention behind your race training is. When you’re in the thick of those hard, long runs and workouts, you have to remind yourself of your “why.” Why do you run? What’s waiting for you at the finish line?

Once you have your “why,” write it down and keep it handy or share it with a friend. This will provide you with reassurance and a surge of motivation when you need it during tough training stretches. When you establish your reasons for why you’re training and why you want to run this race, they can serve as a safety net to fall back on when your motivation starts to wane.

FOR MORE ON SETTING GOALS, HEAD TO THE GOALS SECTION OF THIS GUIDE!



Take time to self-reflect.

Part of figuring out how to stay motivated is recognizing what motivates you in the first place. To do that, we have to turn inward and figure out what challenges us. Are you motivated by competition or camaraderie? Both? Answers to questions like these can give us guidance on how to go about training.

For example, if you thrive when you’re surrounded by other people, join a local running group, find a running partner, or try an indoor running class! If you’re motivated by small wins, set weekly goals for time or distance. Each of us are motivated by different factors, and doing some introspection can help clarify how you should train.

Focus on developing habits—they're more powerful than motivation alone.

This next pro tip comes from Coach Alain, and it's more of a mindset shift: Develop good running habits and don't rely on motivation. Motivation is a feeling, while a habit is a repeated action. It's easier to carry out an action (especially an action that you get used to doing, as a habit) than it is to force yourself to feel a certain way (in this case, motivated). It's a small mindset shift, but the results can be quite powerful. Instead of relying on always feeling a certain way—which is practically impossible—work on turning running into a habit, and practice that habit over and over again.



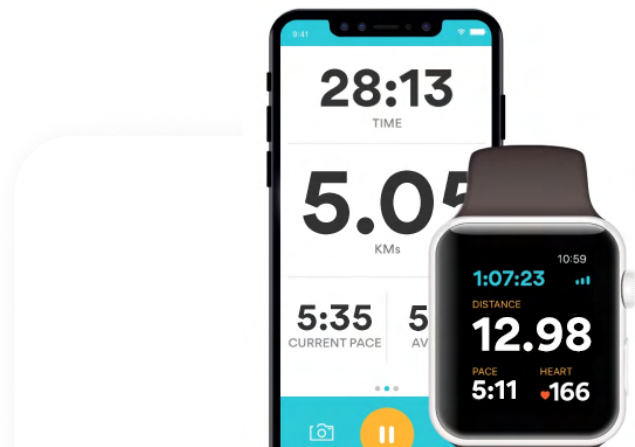
ALAIN

Find an easy way to stay accountable.

In our lives, we have multiple external sources of accountability—we're accountable to our bosses, coaches, family, you name it. But race training requires you to hold yourself accountable, and for some people, self-accountability is difficult. That's why many runners typically like to have both a training plan (so they know what's expected of them) and a way to log their runs (to check them off their list and track progress).

Most importantly, your accountability system has to be sustainable.

You want something quick and easy, like a journal or a running app (the [Runkeeper app](#) tracks your distance, time, and route, and has a space to take notes and log your mood). Finding a way to hold yourself accountable will inevitably make your training go more smoothly, in doing so, help you stay motivated.



Don't go at it alone!

At times, training can feel tough and draining, so it pays to have a support system. Finding a running buddy, accountability partner, or simply someone to text after you complete a run can make the training experience more gratifying (and again, hold you accountable). On the [Runkeeper app](#), you can find and add friends you can share your runs and accomplishments with—so even if you're not together, you can support each other!

Whether you're running a short or long-distance race, looping other people into your training is a great way to boost your motivation. If you can find someone whose goals are similar to yours, that's even better! You can make plans to run with that person and push each other to get out the door on days when it's hard to self-motivate.

The takeaway

Training for a race is a journey—it's a challenging, fulfilling, and worthwhile experience that will teach you quite a lot about yourself if you see it through. In the event that your motivation dwindles during your training, we encourage you to come back to these expert tips and remind yourself that it's part of the process. No one is motivated 24/7, but with the right tools and mindset, nothing can stop you!



Race

Finally, race day is on the horizon! You're coming up on the end of your training plan, and you're wondering what else you can do to prepare for your race. Well, you've come to the right place.

How you prepare your mind and care for your body in the days leading up to the race can be the difference between feeling confident or feeling unprepared. To help, we've outlined what the week before your race, the day before your race, and the day of your race should look like.

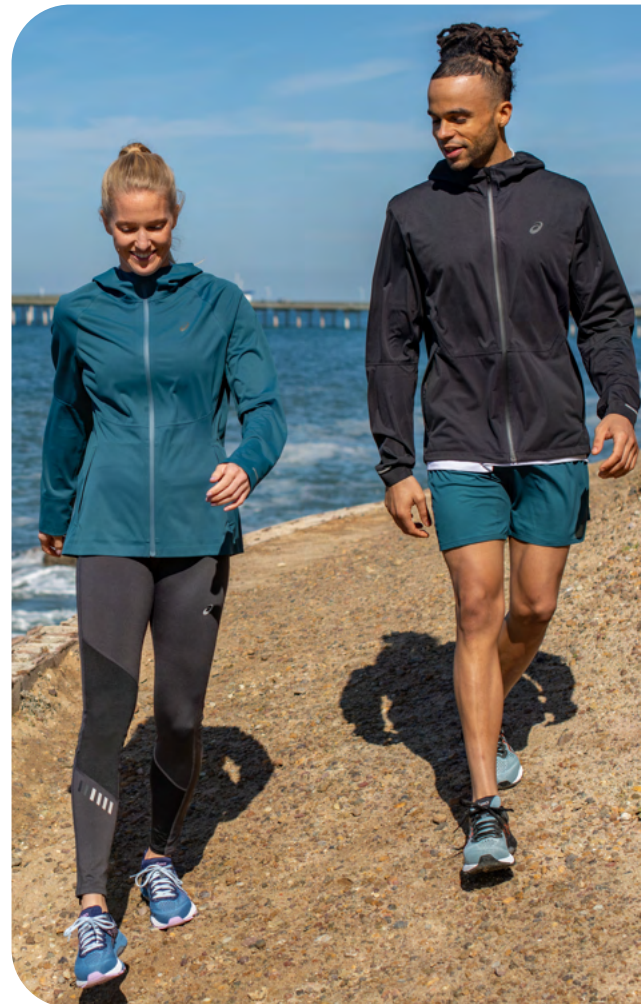
The week leading up to your race

By now, your training plan should be complete (or near-complete), and your focus should be on recovery, rest, and research.

Recovery

Hopefully, you've been putting in the work to recover between your runs, and whatever's been working for you—foam rolling, self-massage, hot or cold baths—you should continue doing in the week leading up to your race. Your last few training runs will likely be shorter than the actual race distance, and the goal of those should be to take it easy. You want your body to recover properly, and to do that, you have to give it a break.

**Note: Part of recovery includes [staying hydrated](#). How much water you need will vary by individual and fluctuate depending on sweat levels. Be sure to listen to your body, and make sure your pee is pale yellow. (Yes, pee is still an optimal indicator.)*





Rest

Sleep is always important, but it's especially crucial that you get quality sleep on the nights leading up to your race. It's natural to feel anxious or excited about the race, but you don't want that to interfere with your sleep schedule. So as race day approaches, take a little extra time at night to stretch, get comfortable, and wind down by reading or meditating (skip the electronics, if possible or park them in another room to charge). You'll be grateful when you feel well-rested and ready to go.

Research

We would also recommend doing some research prior to the race and solidifying your day-of plans. Try to think of ways you can make your life easier on race day, and do those tasks ahead of time. Make a checklist, like this one below, and knock out these to-dos one by one.

Familiarize yourself with the course, noting where the uphill and downhill are so you can mentally prepare for them (if it's a virtual race, plan your route).

Learn where water stations and restrooms are, in case you need them.

Double-check that the clothes you want to wear for the race are clean and set aside (and train with them a few times to be sure they don't cause any chafing).

Triple check the weather and make any necessary adjustments to your outfit (layers are always a good idea).

Fill your car with gas if you're planning to drive to the race start, allow time for parking, or arrange for someone to drop you off (either way, figure out how much time you need).

Attach your bib to the front of your shirt, if you're given one.

Download your running playlist, podcast, or audiobook to your phone, if you run with sound. You might have trouble getting cell service when you're standing in a flock of people, so don't rely on data!

Complete any sort of small task that will save you time and undue stress on race day .

The day and night before your race

The day and night before your race is for preparing yourself mentally and physically, and walking through your plan one last time.

What to eat

Eat as you normally would throughout the day—nothing new or surprising, see our Nutrition section for more—and at night, stick to a meal that's tried and true and contains carbohydrates. Pasta, rice, bread, or potatoes are solid options, but there's no need to go overboard on quantity or “carb-load” for a 5k. Going to bed uncomfortably full can wreak havoc on your sleep, so make sure to only eat until you're full, and then stop.

How to prepare

Whatever you do, don't forget to lay out your race outfit and gear the night before your race. This includes your clothes, shoes, water, headphones, headband, breakfast, race bib, safety pins, anything you might need. You don't want to be scrambling in the morning and risk forgetting something essential. Once you make sure everything is in place for your AM routine, you can start to wind down, chill out, or distract yourself—whatever makes you feel at ease.

How to deal with pre-race nerves

The night before a race can be an anxiety-provoking time for many runners. All of your training is coming to a head, and you may feel nervous now that the big day is here. This is to be expected, but taking steps to reduce your pre-race jitters—like keeping your thoughts positive, and interrupting intrusive thoughts—will go a long way in helping you get the mental and physical rest you need. Meditation and mindfulness (like practicing visualization exercises and basic meditation) can also help you achieve a sound mind before exciting and potentially stressful situations, such as race day.

And if you need more reassurance, remind yourself that you're feeling anxious because you care about your performance and this race has meaning for you. So as much as you can, try to embrace it! Channel your nerves into excitement, and tell yourself over and over that you can do this (because you can!).

The day of your race

Thanks to your stellar preparation, the morning of your race will, in theory, be smooth and methodical. That said, make sure you give yourself plenty of time. Wake up early so you can avoid rushing and panicking—and that way if something goes wrong (you didn't charge your phone, your socks aren't dry, etc.), you can fix it or find an alternative. Plan to arrive at the race location at least one hour ahead of start time so you can warm up and avoid long bathroom lines.

What to eat

What you should eat on race day depends on your preferences and what your body can tolerate. Generally speaking, you should eat foods with carbohydrates about two hours prior to running. A 5k race is considered a shorter race (when compared to a half or full marathon), so your pre-run fuel won't necessarily make or break your performance, but even still, you want to avoid certain foods. Fats, proteins, and high fiber carbohydrates are harder to digest and can cause stomach issues, like bloating and cramping, during your race. It's a good idea to play it safe and eat something you've eaten before a run with no discomfort. A banana, granola bar, or english muffin with a little PB&J are sufficient fuel sources for a 5k race. That may not seem like much, but you don't want to overeat...that can cause stomach issues, too.

The moments before your race & during it

Once you arrive at your race location (seriously, get there early), your goals should be to warm up, use the bathroom, and stay calm and relaxed. You have put in the work to get yourself to this point, and you can reassure yourself that you've done everything you can. Now it's time to run.

How to warm up

To warm up, you can go for a short jog, run a few striders (short sprints to wake up your body), and do some dynamic stretches like high knees, lunges, leg swings, or squats. You want to get your blood pumping and muscles warm. You can stretch anything that feels tight, too, like your calves, quads, and hamstrings.

How to deal with pre-race jitters (again)

Still feeling anxious? It happens, and it's okay. Remind yourself of the work you put in throughout your training, and think back to the times when your training went well and you were proud of yourself. Take deep breaths. As Dr. Justin Ross, Runkeeper coach and clinical psychologist puts it: Trust is the greatest antidote to anxiety that we have, in both sport and life. Trust yourself because you trained, because you're an athlete and because you've overcome challenges in running and in your life.

How to deal with nerves *during* the race

It's possible that at various times throughout the race, you will start to doubt yourself and your ability to finish. If that happens, drown out those negative thoughts by repeating positive ones. You can do this. One mile at a time. Run the mile you're in. You are capable and strong, and you deserve to see this through. Repeat those words, focus on slowing down your breathing, and your mind will be back in the race in no time.



After your race

No matter what happened during your race—whether it went as planned or not—you should cross that finish line with a smile on your face and pride in your heart. You earned that moment, that post-race high, and you're entitled to ride that euphoric feeling out as long as you can. Pat yourself on the back and congratulate other runners. You just conquered a major feat!

Once you cross the finish line and make your way out of the course, find a place to stretch. Water bottles, snacks, and towels are usually given out at the end of races, and you should take all of them because you'll need them. Right away, start drinking water to replace all the fluid you sweat out during the race. It's also wise to have a snack with protein and carbohydrates, to refill your glycogen stores and kickstart your muscle recovery. Finally, take a few minutes to do some static stretching. Touch your toes, stretch your hamstrings, do a few quad pulls, whatever feels good.

AFTER THAT, IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE.



Celebration

Congratulations! You made it to the finish line. We hope you're feeling accomplished and on top of the world because you deserve nothing less.

Now that the race is over, you may be thinking to yourself...what now? Don't worry, we'll walk you through how to recover and of course, how to celebrate!

What to do after you run a race

Chances are after you run a race, you're going to be tired. All of the hard work you put in has come to a close, and you may feel a bit of mental and physical exhaustion sink in. That's why, at least for a day or two after your race, you should take a break from running. Trust us, your mind and body will thank you.

After that initial recovery period, the choice is yours regarding how to proceed. You could take a few active recovery days where you engage in another form of exercise, like cycling, stretching, or yoga. Alternatively, you could take those days to rest and go for a few walks. If you're an experienced runner, you may feel fine the day after a 5k and ready to run again. Each runner's body will require a different amount of recovery time, so it's up to you to decide how long of a break you take, and what the days following that break look like.



A word to the wise, though: Don't jump back into running before your body is ready. You have to remember that you spent weeks training for your race, and you put your body through a lot during that time. Running will always be there; there's no real rush to start up again. Take time to let this achievement sink in—it will help you avoid burnout in the long-term.

How to learn from your race

No matter what the outcome of your race is, there is always something you can learn and take with you for future races. Think about what went well during your race and what you wish had gone better.

Questions to ask yourself after your race:

- Did you cramp up at all?
- Did you need water at any point?
- Were certain kilometres harder than others, physically or mentally?
- Did anything not go as planned?

Questions like these can give you insight into your strengths and weaknesses, and inform your training going forward.

Even if you see your race as having gone poorly, it's still worth reflecting on it. You'll come away with better knowledge of yourself, your capabilities, and where you have room to improve.

How to celebrate!

Every runner celebrates completing a race in their own unique way—and you should celebrate in whatever way you see fit!

Many runners like to celebrate with a delicious meal and surround themselves with loved ones and fellow runners. We asked our Runkeeper coaches what their post-race traditions are (some of which are more, let's say, unique than others).

Here's how they celebrate after finishing a race:



Burgers & buddies

My 3 B's of a post-race celebration are beers, burgers, and buddies! There's nothing better than getting together to celebrate the accumulation of weeks and months of training in the pursuit of crossing another finish line. The post-race celebration is a ritual for runners, and provides a great time to connect with your running community and reflect on everything that went into your training.

BY JUSTIN ROSS

Runkeeper Coach

Get some sleep

Does sleep count? Yeah, that's where it's at. My bed and I rekindle the lost romance from early mornings and late nights.

ALAIN SAINT-DIC

Runkeeper Coach



Head to Brunch

Regardless of the race outcome, I celebrate by having a satisfying brunch with my friends and family, and I thank myself for putting in the training and hard work to complete the race. I also usually toast with a nice mimosa!

CORINNE FITZGERALD

Runkeeper Coach



Dinner & an early night

I pretty much always head to the nearest pub and order a cold beer. Once I have had a shower and had a debrief of the race in my mind and with my coach, I usually go somewhere nice for dinner and then have an early night.

HOLLY RUSH

Runkeeper Coach

Shower & Socialize

Good food and chill vibes! Priority number one is a shower. Then I like to socialize for a little while, but I definitely require an early bedtime after a race!

JESS MOVOLD

Runkeeper Coach





Have a shoey

After I finish a race, there's always lots to celebrate! But, on the special days when I hit a PR, it's time for a SHOHEY! What's a shoey you might ask? You take off your freshly warm shoe that carried you to the finish, fill it with a beer, and taste your victory...and sweat.

MATT MEYERS

Runkeeper Coach

Enjoy the euphoria

I can't say I have a bonafide post-race tradition, but depending on the race and conditions, the most enjoyable post-race memories for me are shared with friends over a simple meal soon after the race when the euphoria level is high.

YUSUF JEFFERS

Runkeeper Coach





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