3-WEEK 5K TRAINING PLAN BEGINNERS

INTRO

Hey there - Thomas from Marathon Handbook here. Thanks for taking the time to grab a copy of this plan!

BREAKDOWN OF TRAINING WORKOUTS

Warm up and Cool down

Always begin your walk/runs, runs, and speed workouts with a 5-minute brisk walk to warm up—this gradually increases your heart rate, activates your muscles, and prepares your body for exercise. Follow every session with a 5-minute cool down walk to help your heart rate return to normal and promote recovery.

Walk/Run Intervals

Walk/run intervals are where you alternate between periods of running and walking—such as running for 1 minute, then walking for 2 minutes, and repeating for a set duration. This approach is especially helpful for beginner runners, as it allows your body to gradually adapt to the impact and effort of running while reducing fatigue and minimizing the risk of injury. In this plan, the intervals are clearly indicated for each workout, showing exactly how long to run and walk for each segment. As your fitness improves, the running intervals gradually increase while walk breaks decrease—helping you build endurance and confidence, one step at a time.

Easy Run

An easy run is a relaxed, low-intensity run done at a conversational pace—you should be able to speak in full sentences without gasping for air. It should feel comfortable, sustainable, and steady enough that you don't need to stop and walk, allowing you to complete the run smoothly from start to finish.

Rest Day

Rest days are essential to your training. These days give your body the chance to recover, adapt, and grow stronger by stepping away from strenuous activity. Use them to rest, hydrate, refuel, and recharge, allowing your muscles and joints to repair and reducing your risk of injury. Prioritizing rest is just as important as the workouts themselves—and it's key to improving your long-term running performance.

Strength Training

Strength training is a key component for long-term success and injury prevention. It helps correct muscle imbalances, improves overall stability and coordination, and makes you a stronger, more efficient, and faster runner. Aim for two strength sessions per week and focus on compound exercises like squats, lunges, glute bridges, calf raises, planks, push-ups, rows, and pull-ups to build balanced, functional strength that supports your running.

Cross Training

Cross-training refers to non-running aerobic workouts that support your running goals while reducing the overall impact on your body. For beginner runners, cross-training is especially beneficial because it helps build aerobic capacity and cardiovascular fitness—the same system used in running—without the repetitive impact on your joints and muscles. This gives your body time to adapt to the physical stress of running gradually, reducing the risk of injury and overtraining. Examples of cross-training include: cycling, swimming, elliptical, rowing, aqua jogging, hiking, and brisk walking.

CUSTOMIZING THE PLAN

No two runners are the same, and there's no such thing as a one-size-fits-all plan. That's why I make all my plans easy to customize: use the Google Sheets or Excel version of this plan to move things around to suit your weekly schedule, shorten or extend the plan, and mix up the workouts to suit your ability level.

In order to edit the file, please download it or make a copy (File>Make a Copy)

MEDICAL DISCLAIMER

This plan is for informational purposes only: it is not a certified exercise / health / wellness regime. Partake in run training at your own risk, always consult a doctor before starting a new exercise regime.

Questions?

Check out our Marathon Handbook Facebook Group, it's an awesome community of runners sharing their knowledge, frustrations, and wins!

Unfortunately I can't respond to individual queries these days, but the FB group is probably an even better source of running wisdom!

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