GoalTodo

Couch to 5K: 12 weeks from scratch, 10 if you can run 10 minutes

Run a 5K

12 weeks · Mon, Nov 30 → Sun, Feb 21

Week by week

Dates	What to do
Nov 30–Dec 6	**Run-walk: One-minute runs** Run-walk · run 1 min, walk 90 sec, 8 rounds · 3× Done when: You finish all three sessions Sticking point: Starting is the hardest part. Put the three days in your calendar now, and lay out your kit the night before.
Dec 7–13	**Run-walk: Ninety-second runs** Run-walk · run 90 sec, walk 2 min, 6 rounds · 3× Done when: You finish all three sessions Sticking point: Run slowly enough that you could talk. Speed doesn't matter yet, only time.
Dec 14–20	**Run-walk: Three-minute runs** Run-walk · run 3 min, walk 2 min, 4 rounds · 3× Done when: You finish all three sessions
Dec 21–27	**Repeat week: Same again** Run-walk · run 3 min, walk 2 min, 4 rounds · 3× Done when: You finish all three sessions, running every 3-minute block without stopping Sticking point: Repeating a week isn't standing still. It's how the next step stops feeling like a jump.
Dec 28–Jan 3	**Run-walk: Five-minute runs** Run-walk · run 5 min, walk 2 min, 3 rounds · 3× Done when: You finish all three sessions
Jan 4–10	**Run-walk: Eight-minute runs** Run-walk · run 8 min, walk 3 min, 2 rounds · 3× Done when: You finish all three sessions Sticking point: Feeling a bit sore the next day is normal. Sharp pain, or pain that gets worse as you run, isn't: stop and rest.
Jan 11–17	**Repeat week: Same again** Run-walk · run 8 min, walk 3 min, 2 rounds · 3× Done when: You finish all three sessions, running both 8-minute blocks without stopping
Jan 18–24	**Run-walk: Your first 20 minutes** Run-walk · run 10 min, walk 3 min, 2 rounds · 2× Run without stopping · 20 min Done when: You run 20 minutes without a walking break Sticking point: Twenty minutes looks like a big jump. Run it slower than the 10-minute blocks and it won't be.
Jan 25–31	**Running: Twenty minutes, three times** Run without stopping · 20 min · 3× Done when: You run 20 minutes without a walking break, three times this week

Dates	What to do
Feb 1–7	**Running: Twenty-five minutes** Run without stopping · 25 min · 3× Done when: You run 25 minutes without a walking break Sticking point: Breathing hard? Run slower. If you can talk in short sentences, the pace is right.
Feb 8–14	**Running: Thirty minutes** Run without stopping · 28 min · 2× Run without stopping · 30 min Done when: You run 30 minutes without a walking break Sticking point: 5 km may take you longer than 30 minutes, and that's fine. Walking for a minute on the day is allowed.
Feb 15–21	**Race week: Two short runs, then the 5K** Easy run · 20 min · 2× 5K · 5 km Done when: You run 5 km. If it takes well past 30 minutes, short walking breaks are fine. Sticking point: Nerves make people start too fast. Run the first kilometre slower than feels right.

How the plan works

You run three times a week: Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. Keep a rest day between runs. You can move the days, as long as no two runs are back to back.

Run-walk means you run for the time given, then walk briskly for the time given, and repeat for the number of rounds. Time the blocks with a watch or phone. You don't need to know how far you've gone until the last weeks.

Easy means you can talk. Run at a pace where you could say a short sentence. Speed doesn't matter. You are building up time on your feet, not pace.

Each week adds a little more running. If you don't run yet, you go from 1-minute runs to 30 minutes without stopping, then the 5K. If you can already run for 10 minutes, you start with 10-minute blocks and reach 30 minutes in seven weeks.

The full plan repeats a few weeks so each step feels smaller. A shorter plan leaves the repeats out. If a week feels too hard, repeat it before moving on.

Which level to pick

- I don't run yet: you haven't run in a while, or you can't run for more than a minute or two without stopping.
- I can run 10 minutes: you can run 10 minutes at an easy pace without walking, today, not years ago.

If you're between the two, pick the first level. It's easier to skip ahead than to recover from starting too hard.

Before you start

If you have a health condition, haven't been active for a long time, or you're worried about your health, speak to a GP or doctor before you start.

You should be able to walk briskly for 20 to 30 minutes. If you can't yet, walk three times a week until you can, then start week 1.

Start every run with a 5-minute warm-up walk, and end it with a 5-minute cool-down walk.

Listen to your body. Take things at your own pace, and stop if something doesn't feel right. Repeating a week is always allowed: the NHS Couch to 5K plan (https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/get-active/get-running-with-couch-to-5k/couch-to-5k-running-plan/) says the same.

Gear

- Running shoes that support your feet. A running shop can help you choose.
- Clothes you can move in, and a supportive sports bra if you need one.
- A watch or phone to time your runs and walks. A free run-walk app can call out the blocks for you.
- Water on warm days. Small sips are enough.
- Something reflective if you run in the dark, and routes that are well lit.

Common mistakes

- Running too fast. If you can't talk, you're running too fast. Slow down until you can, even if it feels like a jog.
- Skipping ahead because a week felt easy. Your heart and lungs get fitter faster than your joints and tendons. The plan is slow on purpose.
- Catching up on missed runs. Don't squeeze two runs into one day. See "If you fall behind" below.
- Running on consecutive days. Rest days are when your body gets stronger. Keep them.
- Trying something new on the day: new shoes, a new breakfast or new kit. Use what you've trained in.

Your 5K

- Pick a 5K to aim for. A local 5K event, such as a parkrun, works well, or a measured 5 km route on your own.
- If your 5K is on a Saturday, keep the two short runs on Tuesday and Thursday that week, so there's still a rest day before the 5K.
- Run only the two short easy runs in race week.
- Have a light snack you've tried before, 1 to 2 hours before you start.
- Start at the back and start slow. Let people pass you early.
- Walking for a minute is fine. Finishing is the goal.

If you fall behind

Missed 1 week: If you missed a whole week, do that week again rather than skipping ahead. If you missed only a run or two, carry on with the current week. Don't add the missed runs on top, and don't run two days in a row to catch up.

Missed 2 weeks: Repeat the last week you finished in full, then carry on from there. If that runs past your 5K date, leave out a repeat week, never the last two weeks.

Missed 3 weeks: Go back two weeks from where you stopped and build up again. If there are no longer enough weeks, enter your 5K date on the plan page to see if it's still realistic, or pick a later 5K.

Missed 4 or more weeks: Your fitness has dropped. Choose the level and week that match what you can run today, and enter a new 5K date on the plan page to see if it's realistic.

Sources

NHS Better Health
`https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/get-active/get-running-with-couch-to-5k/couch-to-5k-running-plan/`
“By the end of the 9 weeks, you’ll be running for 30 minutes. That’s a brilliant achievement, whatever your starting point.”

NHS Better Health
`https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/get-active/get-running-with-couch-to-5k/`
“You can complete the program in 9 weeks or longer, depending on what works best for you.”

Hal Higdon
`https://www.halhigdon.com/training-programs/5k-training/novice-5k/`
“This program works best if you have a goal 5K in 8 weeks.”

ACTIVE.com
`https://www.active.com/running/articles/beginner-5k-training-plan-9-weeks`
“Your cardiovascular system adapts faster than your tendons and joints.”

Irish Heart Foundation
`https://irishheart.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/Couch-to-5K-Running-Plan.pdf`
“If you have any medical conditions or have not been physically active in a long time, speak to your doctor before starting.”

Checked on `2026-11-26`

This plan online	`https://goaltodo.com/run-a-5k`
Reach it with others on Welang	`https://welang.com/goals/run-a-5k`
Reach it on your own in HourLife	`https://www.hourlife.com`

This plan is a guide, not medical advice. See a doctor before starting if you have a health condition, are pregnant, or haven't exercised in a long time.