

An Introduction to Running

How Do I Start a Running Program? There is a huge health advantage to 30 minutes of aerobic exercise 3-5 times a week. While you can get a heart rate monitor to determine your optimal exertion level, it is also enough to just try to stay in your “happy zone”! Start out walking for 30 minutes on a regular basis, and then throw in periods of running. When you start to feel bad or breathe hard (no panting!), walk until you recover and are ready to try again. Not every session will improve upon the last; listen to your body and slow down any time you can’t keep a smile on your face!

The most important thing to remember is to have fun! If you try to do too much too quickly, you can burn out or even increase your chance of injury. Listen to your body, and don’t get too hung up on particular training programs or how fast you approach long-term goals. Take a long-term approach, and you’ll find that while you might not seem to improve on a day-to-day basis, month-to-month you WILL see improvement.

Equipment: You need very little equipment to run... not even shoes! But most people will want a comfortable pair of shoes designed for running, moisture-wicking shorts and t-shirts (cotton can hold sweat, get heavy, and chafe), and a hand-held or strap-on water bottle (filled with water or electrolyte drink). In cold weather, gloves and some type of ear covering really helps, even when you are still running in shorts and a t-shirt! In even colder weather, layering is the best strategy, allowing you to remove an outer layer (and tie it around your waist) if you get hot. And if you plan to be out for more than an hour, you might want to take along something to eat that is easily digestible, such as a gel pack.

What Type of Shoes Do I Buy? The most important thing to look for in a shoe is that it is comfortable, and make sure the toe box is wide enough to let you spread your toes. Don’t buy a shoe hoping to break it in or get used to it later! The next feature I recommend is a flexible sole, without the “stability control” stiff plastic mid-sole bracing, since this allows your foot to flex properly and builds strong foot muscles. Finally, I recommend a shoe that has as little heel height and padding as you can comfortably get away with. New runners can often start in a minimal shoe, which can help foot strength and running form, whereas long-time runners are usually not willing to slow down to adjust to a minimal shoe, and should make the transition more slowly (either by only using the minimal shoes for short runs until they adapt, or to only make small changes in each pair of new shoes).

Where do I Run? I prefer to run outside whenever possible. Better yet, running on trails or on the grass can even be more fun, and can help strengthen and condition your body in ways that running on a flat, straight road cannot. When you can’t run outdoors, you can run on an indoor running track, though always running in a circle can be hard on your joints and muscles. A treadmill is also a good indoor alternative, though its suspension system is not the same on your muscles as running on the road. Because a treadmill is easier, it is recommended that you use a 1% incline to mimic the work load of running on the road.

Do I Stretch Before I Run? Stretching before any exercise temporarily weakens the muscles, so stretching is best done immediately after a run, and hours or days later. Instead, warming up before a run is a better idea to get the blood flowing and warm up the muscles. Jumping jacks, strides, or even walking or running slow for the first 10 minutes are all good warm-up strategies, and increase your performance and reduce the likelihood of injuries.



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