

From couch to 5K

Alessandra Stasnopolis, RDN, LDN

If the idea of running a 5K sounds both exciting and intimidating, you're not alone. The **Couch to 5K** approach is a beginner-friendly way to gradually build endurance, strength and confidence—all without burning out or feeling overwhelmed.

But success isn't just about lacing up your shoes and hitting the pavement. A well-rounded wellness routine that includes **nutrition, hydration, stretching** and **smart training** can make all the difference. Here's how to support your journey from the couch to the finish line in five easy steps:

Here's what a typical Week 1 might look like:

Couch to 5K (Week 1)

Warm-up: 5-minute walk

Alternate: 1 minute jog / 2 minutes walk (Repeat 6–8 times)

Cool down: 5-minute walk

Over time, you'll increase your jogging time and decrease walking. The trick is to gradually increase your run time each week. For example:

Couch to 5K (Weeks 2-4)

Week 2: 90 seconds jog / 2 minutes walk

Week 3: 3 minutes jog / 90 seconds walk

Week 4: 5 minutes jog / 2.5 minutes walk

Fuel your runs with nutrition

Eating the right foods can boost your energy and recovery.

- **Pre-run snack:** Eat 30–60 minutes before your run. Try a banana, a bagel with peanut butter or a sports drink.
- **Post-run recovery:** Focus on protein and carbs to replenish and rebuild. Greek yogurt with berries and granola, a smoothie with protein powder, or a turkey wrap are great options.



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Don't skip hydration

Hydration isn't just for race day; it's for every day. Dehydration makes you feel lethargic and increases the risk of cramps or headaches, so keep that water bottle close!

- **Before your run:** Sip water regularly throughout the day. Drink about 8–16 oz an hour before your workout.
- **During/after:** For short runs (45 minutes or less), water is fine. For longer sessions (one hour or more) or hot days, consider electrolyte drinks especially if you're a heavy sweater.

Stretch for strength and recovery

Stretching improves mobility, enhances flexibility, reduces the risk of injury, and promotes better posture and muscle balance. It prepares your body for movement by increasing blood flow to your muscles, and it can help reduce post-workout soreness when done after exercise.

- **Before your run:** Try dynamic stretches like leg swings, high knees, and arm circles to warm up.
- **After your run:** Use static stretches, for example, hold hamstring, quad, and calf stretches for 20 to 30 seconds.

Consistency > perfection

Remember, this is a journey. Some days will feel amazing, others will feel tough. That's okay! Show up for yourself, move your body, fuel it well and stay hydrated. You'll be amazed at what you can accomplish. Your 5K finish line is closer than you think.

Keep in mind that if you have any health conditions like heart issues, diabetes, or chronic pain, you should always talk with your doctor about new exercise plans or supplements you may be taking.