

Couch to 5K - Everything You Need to Know!

What is a Couch to 5K program? It is an 8-week program that progresses from short bursts of jogging mixed with longer periods of walking to jogging a complete 5K distance (3.1 miles). Because it is progressive, most people can easily run a 5K at the end, if they have adhered to the program. In addition to two group runs each week, our program encourages you to do work-outs on your own on other days, for optimum benefit. We have learned that “Couch to 5K” is a misnomer. If you are currently very sedentary, we advise building your endurance through a walking program before the beginning of the Couch to 5K program. Our walking program in February is one way to achieve that.

What is the schedule?

February 5, 2020: Recreational runners start weekly group runs at 5:30 p.m. Distances between two and three miles for established runners.

February 8, 2020: Couch to 5K prep (walking program) starts at 1 p.m. Weekly group walks on Saturdays through February 29 (and walking on your own) will help prepare you for the Couch to 5K program if you are not currently active.

Couch to 5K starts Saturday March 7, 2020. There will be two group training sessions each week: one on Saturday mornings at 8 a.m. and one on Wednesday evenings at 5:30 p.m. The last week of the program is that of April 26, and that Sunday the group will run the 5K race at the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon. Sign up here: www.okcmarathon.com

Who can participate? Anyone in reasonably good health, college-age or older. If you are between 13 and 18 and want to participate, contact Susan Drago at (405) 664-2253 or susan.dragoo@gmail.com.

Where will we run? We will often meet at Paradigm Church, 4301 Country Club Terrace in Norman, and run from there on neighborhood sidewalks/streets and on trails at nearby parks. To provide some variety, we will sometimes meet at different locations in Norman such as Saxon Trails and Sutton Wilderness. Watch the Facebook page for updates. [facebook.com/paradigmrunners](https://www.facebook.com/paradigmrunners)

Map to Paradigm Church location: <https://goo.gl/maps/gUGZuy6nQASw3p5K7>

How much time will the group runs require? Allot about an hour for the whole experience, with the process of gathering before the run, running for 30 minutes, then cooling down and rehydrating.

What should I wear? Shoes are your most important piece of running gear. The best idea is to go to a reputable running store to get fitted for a proper pair of shoes. Fortunately, we have OK Runner nearby, in Brookhaven Village. <https://www.myokrunner.com/>

Running shoes are designed to allow your foot to strike the ground properly, reducing the amount of shock that travels up your leg. They're also made to fit your foot snugly, which reduces the slipping and sliding that can lead to blisters. If you're not ready to invest in a new pair of running shoes from OK Runner, check out the selection at Academy and other stores. With any pair of running shoes, try on several pair, and see how they feel walking and running. OK Runner will let you go outside and run in them before you buy them.

Once the shoes are taken care of, plan to wear shirts and shorts of breathable, sweat-wicking fabrics, i.e. synthetics, not cotton. Running tights are often a comfortable choice and, for women, a well-made running bra is a good investment. Wear synthetic running socks, too. In winter weather, add a layer such as a fleece, and a stocking cap and gloves if it's very cold, but don't wear outer garments that are too heavy, as you will warm up while running.

Be sure to bring a hat, sunglasses, sunscreen and a water bottle. You won't need to carry the water bottle (although you can) for the short distances we'll be running, but you'll need your own water container for hydration at the end of the run. We'll have a jug of water available. You may also want to bring a post-run snack (power bar, banana, etc.).

Consider where you are going to put your keys and phone, if you plan to keep them with you. Carrying your phone in your hand is not the best option. Here's a good, and inexpensive, choice for carrying small items: <https://www.amazon.com/SPIbelt-Sports-Running-Belt-Adventurers/>

What should I eat before running? (Should I eat before running?)

Everyone is different. Some people can eat a meal and go running on a full stomach with no problem. They are probably the exception. Others who run in the morning may go out and run without eating anything at all.

That said, many eat a light meal of simple carbohydrates a couple of hours before running. Toast and peanut butter may be a good choice. A banana an hour before you run may work well. It's unlikely you'll be comfortable running on a full stomach.

Should I stretch before or after I run?

The best way to warm up for a run is with dynamic warm-ups, or active, moving stretches that target the movements you'll use in running. We'll be doing a brisk 5-minute walk for a warm-up.

Static stretching is telling your muscles that you're ready to relax, which is not ideal when you're about to call on your muscles to go run a certain distance. Save your static stretching for after you finish your run, when your muscles are warm, and you're about to take it easy.

That said, if you feel like you need to stretch before you run, please do.

I'm concerned that I may be too old. You're not too old. And you might just live longer, and healthier, if you start running. There is some evidence that people with a very high physical activity level have longer telomeres. These are the protective caps on the end of your chromosomes, and are considered one marker of biological age. Endurance exercise has been shown in studies to preserve telomere length.

Your endurance tends to peak later than power, so you can take up running later than most sports and still get faster. Plenty of people set personal bests at all distances into their 40s and 50s. There is also the system of "age grading," which calculates your times against your age and gender, and you can keep improving these scores throughout your life.

That said, if you have any physical restrictions or concerns, be sure and check with your doctor.

Is it normal to feel pain when I run?

If you've exercised before, you know how it feels to have sore muscles after a good work-out, and this is common with running as well. At first, you may be a little stiff getting up when you've been sitting for a while after a run. This is normal.

And it's normal to experience some discomfort as you add distance and intensity to your training. But significant pain isn't normal. If something feels so bad that you have to run with a limp or otherwise alter your stride, you're probably injured. Stop running immediately, and take a few days off. If you're not sure, try walking for a minute or two to see if the discomfort disappears. If it doesn't go away, consult your doctor.

I feel out of breath when I run. Is something wrong?

Running causes you to breathe harder than usual, so some huffing and puffing is normal. Most of that out-of-breath feeling diminishes as you become fitter. Concentrate on breathing from deep down in your belly, and if you have to, slow down or take walk breaks. If the breathlessness persists, consult your doctor.

I often get a stitch in my side when I run. Will these ever go away?

Side stitches are common among beginners because the abdomen is not used to the jostling that running causes. Most runners find that stitches go away as fitness increases. Also, running on a full stomach may contribute to stitches. To get rid of the stitch, slow to a walk, start to regulate and deepen your breathing. Even better, try to prevent stitches by warming up properly pre-run, focusing on breathing slowly and deliberately while you run, and experimenting with what to eat pre-run, to see what is best for you.

How should I breathe when I run?

When you're new at running and your cardiovascular system is not quite conditioned to it yet, breathing while running becomes a chore. You may feel like you're gasping for breath, or your lungs are burning, or you can't quite catch your breath. If this is the case, first of all, slow down. Take walk breaks. Our gradual increase in running v. walking takes care of this.

You'll find a lot of techniques based on counting, like breathe in 2 counts, out for 2 counts, or trying a 3-2 count instead. But thinking too hard about how to breathe may distract you from the actual process of running. What's best is to keep a consistent rhythm to your breath, without over-thinking it. And use your nose, mouth, or any combination that feels natural to you. Every person is different, and trying to mess with what your body is trying to do naturally may not be productive.

What can I do about blisters/chafing/shin splints?

These are very common complaints for new runners. Blisters are usually the result of poorly fitting shoes. Some suggest buying running shoes a half size larger than your regular shoe size, since your feet swell when running, but that is not always the best approach. Invest in good-quality, synthetic running socks. And if you continue to get blisters, try a different pair of shoes.

Chafing is painful. Luckily there are some products you can buy to prevent chafing, like Body Glide, which you rub on your skin in the spots where skin rubs against skin, or skin rubs against fabric. Knee-length running tights can also help reduce chafing on your thighs. If your chafed areas are consistently the result of rubbing against fabric, it may be that you have to try a different item of clothing.

Shin splints are caused by your tibia bone pulling away from the connective tissue of your muscles, creating micro tears. One of the main causes is running too much too soon, so when you're starting to run, you need to build up slowly to avoid shin splints. Another reason our gradual approach is a good idea.

Shin splints can also be caused by fast downhill running, worn-out shoes, or consistently running on a banked surface. So you can also try easing off on downhills, making sure you have new shoes, and varying your route and the direction you run, if you're running somewhere like the edge of a road where you're constantly on a slight slope.

Want more info? Call or text Susan Dragoo at (405) 664-2253, or email susan.dragoo@gmail.com.

Ready to sign up? Use this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/KQN7BTM>