



[Set an Appropriate Goal](#)

A 5K (3.2 miles) can take as little as 15 or 20 minutes for fast runners and as much as an hour for walkers. Because there is such a wide range of abilities, it's important to keep in mind that you are the only one you are competing against, and your goal is to do the best that you can do, avoid injuries, and have fun.

[Find and Register for the 5K \(we are registering today\)](#)

Choose a race that is approximately 6 weeks to 12 weeks from now and register for it in advance. Committing to the race in advance gives you more incentive to train and sets an expectation that you will plan for the race accordingly.

[Start Training](#)

There are [very elaborate 5K training programs](#), but a simplified program should include three days of exercise per week with one day of rest in between workouts.

- **Training Day #1** is your fast, high-effort day. Walk or run a short distance at a fast pace. Start with 1/4 mile and slowly add distance until you cover a mile at a fast pace.
- **Training Day #2** is a moderate-intensity day where you walk or run at a moderate pace. Start with one mile and gradually work up to the full 5K (3.2 miles) at a moderate pace.
- **Training Day #3** should be your long, slow day. This is where you build endurance and get your muscles accustomed to exercising for a longer time. Try to start at two miles and gradually work up to 3 or 4 miles.

[Vary Your Training Intensity](#)

During your high effort days, mix running (or jogging) with walking to boost your intensity. This is also called interval training and it works the same for beginning and elite athletes. Run or jog as fast as you can for about 30 seconds, then walk a minute to recover and repeat another 30 second interval. You can do as few as two intervals or as many as 10 in a session. This sort of training will increase speed, muscle tone, and endurance while helping you get fit faster. For more advanced athletes, consider adding [speed training drills](#).

[Strength Train](#)

Weight lifting two to three times per week is another way to improve your 5K run. Not only will it strengthen the muscles, ligaments and tendons to help prevent injury, it will make the leg muscles less prone to fatigue during the event. Use a [runners weight-lifting routine](#) or consider [a simplified strength training program](#) for fast results.

[Warm-up Before Exercise](#)

A proper warm-up increases the blood flow to the working muscle which results in decreased muscle stiffness, less risk of injury, improved performance and psychological preparation for an event. Before your 5K training and racing, a good warm-up includes an easy three-minute jog and three 30-second, fast-paced efforts or sprints. Complete the warm-up 5 minutes before the race start.

[Stretch After Exercise](#)

Flexibility is an important component of fitness, and exercise tends to increase the amount of flexibility in a joint. Flexibility is also specific to the type of movement needed for a sport, so it is more important for some sports than others. Runners should focus on the hip flexors and the hamstrings. The following stretch is ideal for these muscles. Start in a lunge position, with one leg back and one leg forward. Straighten the back leg to stretch the hip flexors. Return to the starting position, and then straighten the front leg to stretch the hamstrings. Hold each stretch about 15 seconds.

Eat Right Before Exercise

Eating a simple meal of 200 to 400 calories about two to three hours before the race is important to have fuel for the event, but also have time to digest the food. Never experiment with food or drink on race day. It's wise to practice eating before training to make sure the food works for you, then replicate this meal on the race day.

Eat Right After Exercise

What and when you eat following exercise can be just as important as what you eat before. While the pre-exercise meals can ensure that adequate glycogen stores are available for optimal performance, the post-exercise meal is critical to recovery and improves your ability to train consistently.

Listen to Your Body

If you experience any sharp pain, weakness or light-headedness during exercise, pay attention. This is your body's signal that something is wrong and you should stop exercise. Pushing through acute pain is the fastest way to develop a severe or chronic injury. If you don't feel well, you should take some time off until your body heals.

Avoid Pre-Race Jitters

Pre-race jitters are normal, so try not to misinterpret it or think it is fear; that adrenaline rush you feel is normal and it is part of your body's natural preparation for the competition. To help avoid nervousness before the event, arrive with plenty of time so you aren't rushed, get a thorough warm-up, know the course, and dress for the weather. If you find yourself thinking negative thoughts before or during the race, try to focus only on your breathing and race like you don't care about the outcome. Remember goal number one: you are only competing against yourself, so enjoy the moment.

Please visit Black Women for Wellness website: www.bwwla.com and www.bwwla.org,
www.facebook.com/blackwomenforwellness