



Couch to 5K: week by week - Exercise

During lockdown there has been a lot of coverage given to Joe Wix, Mr. Motivator and even the 'Green Goddess' extolling us all to exercise more. But how many knew that the NHS website housed a lot of information on the subject as well? Below is a week-by-week description of the 9-week set of Couch to 5K podcasts. Each week involves 3 runs.

Week 1

For your 3 runs in week 1, you will begin with a brisk 5-minute walk, then alternate 1 minute of running and 1-and-a-half minutes of walking, for a total of 20 minutes.

Week 2

For your 3 runs in week 2, you will begin with a brisk 5-minute walk, then alternate 1-and-a-half minutes of running with 2 minutes of walking, for a total of 20 minutes.

Week 3

For your 3 runs in week 3, you will begin with a brisk 5-minute walk, then 2 repetitions of 1-and-a-half minutes of running, 1-and-a-half minutes of walking, 3 minutes of running and 3 minutes of walking.

Week 4

For your 3 runs in week 4, you will begin with a brisk 5-minute walk, then 3 minutes of running, 1-and-a-half minutes of walking, 5 minutes of running, 2-and-a-half minutes of walking, 3 minutes of running, 1-and-a-half minutes of walking and 5 minutes of running.

Week 5

There are 3 different runs this week:

Run 1: a brisk 5-minute walk, then 5 minutes of running, 3 minutes of walking, 5 minutes of running, 3 minutes of walking and 5 minutes of running.

Run 2: a brisk 5-minute walk, then 8 minutes of running, 5 minutes of walking and 8 minutes of running.

Run 3: a brisk 5-minute walk, then 20 minutes of running, with no walking.

Week 6

There are 3 different runs this week:

Run 1: a brisk 5-minute walk, then 5 minutes of running, 3 minutes of walking, 8 minutes of running, 3 minutes of walking and 5 minutes of running.

Run 2: a brisk 5-minute walk, then 10 minutes of running, 3 minutes of walking and 10 minutes of running.

Run 3: a brisk 5-minute walk, then 25 minutes of running with no walking.

Week 7

For your 3 runs in week 7, you will begin with a brisk 5-minute walk, then 25 minutes of running.

Week 8

For your 3 runs in week 8, you will begin with a brisk 5-minute walk, then 28 minutes of running.

Week 9

For your 3 runs in week 9, you will begin with a brisk 5-minute walk, then 30 minutes of running.

Tips on progression

The programme is designed for beginners to gradually build up their running ability so they can eventually run 5km without stopping.

The pace of the 9-week running plan has been tried and tested by thousands of new runners.

You can, however, repeat any one of the weeks until you feel physically ready to move on to the next week.

Structure is important for motivation, so try to allocate specific days of the week for your runs and stick to them.

Rest days

Rest days are critical. Having one between each week's runs will reduce your chance of injury and also make you a stronger, better runner.

Resting allows your joints to recover from what is a high-impact exercise, and your running muscles to repair and strengthen.

Alternatively, you could do Strength and Flex on your rest days. This is a 5-week plan designed to improve your strength and flexibility, which will help your running.

Aches and pains

Some new runners starting the programme experience calf pain or sore shins (sometimes known as shin splints).

Such aches can be caused by running on hard surfaces or by running in shoes that do not have enough foot and ankle support.

Always do the 5-minute warm-up walks as instructed in the podcasts before each run, and check that your running shoes are offering good support.

For more information on preventing and treating injuries, read our page on sports injuries.

You will have good runs and bad runs – accept it, and don't spend too much time analysing the how and why. Even a bad run is good for you.

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/couch-to-5k-week-by-week/>