

Focused on a 5K: Taking Your First Steps

Taking part in a 5K walk or run event can be an exciting challenge for your own personal fitness. Whether you choose to walk or run the 3.1 miles, participating in and completing the event takes some planning and preparation. This fact sheet will outline the first steps you need to take to ensure a safe start before beginning to train for the event.

Get a Checkup

It is strongly suggested that you talk with your doctor before training for a 5K event. Three miles is not a short distance. If you are walking the course this could take you anywhere from 45 minutes to over an hour, depending on your speed. If you are not used to being physically active for this amount of time, this could be a challenge. A visit to your doctor will let you know if your body is ready for it. It will also help to inform you of where you should begin in the training process.

In addition, a checkup by a doctor is important if you are new to running and hope to run the course for the 5K. Running can be a fun and beneficial physical activity, but it is also a vigorous activity. It can put strain on the heart and joints, so it is important to ask your doctor if you should take part in running. Those that have the following conditions should probably choose walking for physical activity instead of running:

- Orthopedic problems
- Heart problems
- More than 20 percent overweight
- Certain asthma conditions

Set Your Goal

Regardless of whether you walk or run the course, make your goal to finish your first 5K event. At this point, don't worry about how fast you finish it or if you'll be able to run the whole thing. If you continue to compete in walk or run events, you may begin to set goals of improving your time or moving at a faster pace, but this will come later. Finishing the race is a huge accomplishment and it should be the main focus of your training.

Shoes

Good, quality shoes are essential for walking or running. They can protect you from blisters, sore muscles and more serious injuries. If you plan to walk and make walking your main physical activity, then choose a shoe designed specifically for walking. If you plan to run, even if you'll be walking for a little while before you are able to run, choose a shoe made specifically for running. Ask questions about what activities shoes are designed for when you are shopping. Try on several pairs and walk around the store.

Everyone's feet are a little different so you'll need to find what brand is the most comfortable for you.



In his book, *The Complete Guide to Walking for Health, Weight Loss and Fitness*, Mark Fenton suggests using the poke, bend, and twist test when shopping for walking shoes.

- **Poke** – Place the shoe on a table. Using a pencil push down on the inside of the shoe at the heel. The toe of the shoe should lift up. Now push down on the outside of the shoe at the toe. The heel should lift up. This test indicates that the shoe has a good heel to toe rolling motion that is needed when walking.
- **Bend** – Hold the heel of the shoe in one hand and press up on the toe with the other. Check where the shoe bends. It should bend at the ball of the foot. Avoid shoes that bend at the arch, as they may not provide enough arch support for your activity.
- **Twist** – Hold the heel of the shoe in one hand and the toe of the shoe in the other hand. Gently twist the shoe and assess the flexibility. You want the shoe to be moderately flexible when you try this test so that it will allow your foot to move naturally when you are walking.

Clothing

When you are physically active you should simply wear whatever clothing that is comfortable for you. T-shirts, sweatpants and sport shorts are common choices. However, if you are active in more extreme weather conditions such as hot and humid air or in cold temperatures, your clothing choice goes beyond just comfort. In hot weather, it is important for sweat to evaporate from the body so that your body can cool itself. Cotton clothing tends to get wet and heavy from sweat in warm weather and can become uncomfortable and hot. In these conditions, it is wise to choose clothing made of fabrics that wick moisture away from the body. These fabrics absorb the sweat and stay dry and comfortable, keeping you cool. These fabrics are found in a variety of stores and have a variety of names. Some common names include CoolMax®, DriFit® and light Capaline®.

When the weather is wet or cold you'll also need protection. In cold weather, the key is to layer your clothing. Then, if you get hot during activity you can take off one layer to cool yourself and still be protected. You might choose moisture-wicking fabric such as those mentioned above for your first layer to absorb and dry any sweat. The next layer should be used as insulation to keep you warm. It might be a fleece vest, jacket, or tights. The outer layer should protect you from wind, rain, and snow. This might include a waterproof jacket and pants.

In addition, outdoor activities can expose you to sunburn. Wear a waterproof and sweatproof sports-formula sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 on your exposed skin. A wide-brimmed hat will also protect your neck, face, and ears.

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