

Tips for new runners

Expert advice to get you started on a running plan, including what to wear, warming up and nutrition.

What to wear

If you haven't exercised for a while, chances are you may not have any suitable clothing. Don't let this be an excuse – once you have the outfit sorted, you're far more likely to feel motivated to get out there and use it.

You need a pair of running shoes. Shop around and find sales staff with some technical knowledge or ask us at SSWC. A decent pair of running shoes can cost around £30 to £40, and running socks can also reduce your risk of blisters.

In terms of clothing, you don't really need technical gear. You just need something loose and comfortable in a breathable material, like cotton. If you enjoy and intend to keep running regularly, some specialist clothing would be a good investment. Women should also consider buying a sports bra, which is sturdier than a regular bra and provides additional support. Normal bras reduce breast movement by around 30%, but good sports bra achieves closer to 55%.

Warming up and down

It's really important to warm up and warm down at the beginning and end of the session. Don't just go out the front door and start running, make sure you go through a preparatory brisk walking stage. As for stretching before a run, opinion is divided on whether this is necessary or even helpful.

For a warm-down, the worst thing you can do is stop running and immediately sit down, so keep walking until you're fully recovered.

You may want to put on an extra layer of clothing while cooling down, as this will stop you getting cold.

How to run

Good running technique will help make your runs feel less tiring, reduce your risk of injury and, ultimately, be more enjoyable.

Avoid striking the ground with your heel or your forefoot first. Landing on the middle of your foot is the safest way to land for most recreational runners. Your foot should land below your hips – not right in front of you.

Eating and drinking

It's important to have energy for your run, but don't overdo it. Avoid having a large meal within two hours of your run. You need blood to be in your muscles, not your digestive system. However, a light snack, such as a banana, before running is fine.

As for water, provided you are drinking enough throughout the day, this should not be problem. Some people like to have a water bottle with them while running. If you're thirsty, drink – just not too much.

Finding time and staying on track

If you have decided to take on the challenge of Couch to 5K, you are probably making a commitment to becoming more active. This is great and is so important for your health, but making a change like this will require effort and dedication.

"When you decide to start Couch to 5K, you need to examine all the potential barriers that could get in the way and work out in advance how you're going to deal with them," explains Robin Gargrave of Central YMCA, the activity for health charity. "Once you've done that, you can start to commit some time, and I would put that in your diary or have a chart on the wall. You could even put some reminders up on the fridge to remind you of the benefits – anything that might trigger you."

Robin also recommends persuading a friend or relative to get involved too. "Running with a buddy can really help. Family members need at least to be supportive – it would be fantastic if they can buddy you and come along for a run."

Robin also says it's important to accept in advance that you will encounter setbacks in your Couch to 5K journey. You might have a hectic week at work, be away from home, or even experience illness or injury. "If you're feeling under the weather – particularly if you have a temperature – do not run," warns Robin. "It could be dangerous. But lapse is not failure. Everyone lapses, just don't give up. It doesn't matter – as long as you get back on the programme."

This is where the SSWC running group ticks so many boxes- you are running as a group- safety in numbers, running with a group is motivational, time flies by as people are busy chatting and you have like-minded people and qualified coaches to help you