

How do I train my kids/family to run a 5K?

I get asked this question a lot. It really can be broken down into four basic components. The information presented here is based on my experience as person who started running at age of 29, a parent of two children, a GOTR coach and combing through articles on the internet!

Motivation: Pick a prize to encourage your kids/family. Why do all runs give away T-shirts---because that is what motivates adults! Crazy but true--we all need the carrot at the end of a stick. Reward your kids with a family outing to the movies, fancy dinner out to a favorite place, or a trip to mini golf or bookstore; whatever would appeal to your child or family. Log your training sessions on a chart for the family to see and admire. Children really like to see and visualize their progress. Maybe a contest with another family to see which family has the faster time can help motivate. Our run is chip timed so results will be the most accurate you can get! Sometimes a new pair of shoes or new sweatshirt can help kick start your training program too!

Smart Training: Four simple words: train like the tortoise. Running is like most activities—consistent, repetitive training three times a week is better than running once a week for a longer period of time. Slow and steady truly wins the race. Plan to train 3x a week for 25-45 minutes --which includes time for warm up and stretching afterwards. Two workouts a week the focus should be running, but the third workout can be a cross training day---something aerobic, but not running. Try a bike ride, play dance party game on the Wii or PS3, play basketball. Have swim relay races in the pool, hike the Forbidden Trail, or try a workout from the On-demand section from Comcast or Verizon. This fun “cross training” will help break up the same work out pattern that so many kids (and adults) find de-motivating. Allow your kids to help pick the activity for the cross training. If your child is already involved in an aerobic sport (basketball, indoor soccer, hockey for example) you can consider their practices or games part of this cross training activity. I found a great training program created by a parent to help her kids train and complete a 5K. And yes it can be done!

Equipment: Late winter and early spring is the best time to start working out outside---better before the sticky humidity sets in! Running is a sport that truly needs very little equipment to get started.

- Shoes: A good pair of running shoes/sneakers is necessary—but can be found at Kohl’s, Dick’s or your favorite shoe store. Kids typically will have a good sneaker that they can wear. If you want help in finding the right shoe/fit--visit Born to Run in Springhouse, Fleet Feet by Whole Foods, or North Wales Running Co. Store in North Wales. All have professionals on staff to help find the shoe that fits properly for you or your child. Best advice I can give here is to pick a shoe that feels right on your foot---you should not feel a weird bump or support when walking. Shoes are manufactured for all types of arches and widths—a few days taken to finding the perfect pair are worth it.

- **Clothing:** When deciding what to wear when running outside—realize that for the first 5-10 minutes, you will be a little chilly—but by the end, your body temp will have warmed up. My hands and ears are what get cold first—get a \$1.00 pair of stretchy one-size-fits-all gloves at AC Moore and a knit hat at Five Below. To avoid the whining from kids, plan to dress them in layers and have a spot picked out where you can safely leave the layers behind.
- **Watch:** Get a digital watch or timer to monitor your training. Your first weeks of training will be intervals of walking and running and a digital timer will keep you honest. Or you could use the timer function on your smart phone, but purchase nice holder to make running with your phone easy to manage.

Nutrition: Eating a light snack –granola bar, apple, Clementine, cheese stick, something that your family is used to eating ---at least 30 minutes before will prevent the –“Mom/Dad I am so starving!” excuse during the workout. Don’t plan to exercise right after a heavy meal, trying a new or unusual cuisine, or after not having anything to eat or drink for 3 hours---all are recipes for a poor experience and discouragement. Having a water bottle is must during training. Kids can dehydrate quickly and should be reminded to drink. Stopping for a quick drink every 10 minutes can be a way to break up the exercise time into manageable chunks for kids. The best thing to eat after your heart rate has gotten back to normal is a healthy protein snack, not a blast of carbohydrates. Try a glass of low-fat chocolate milk, or make a yogurt smoothie—Yoplait makes great ones you could try---and really what child does not like a frosty smoothie!

I hope you have found this information helpful and please check out the Kids 5K training program that I have pulled together. It has some great advice on stretching and how to get your kiddos started on their way to their first 5K! We are lucky to be so close to Mondauk which has a great 1 mile packed earth track to practice and train. Please e-mail me if you have any questions about the Burning for Learning 5K Run/Walk.

Keep those feet moving!

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