Couch to Marathon

YOUR FIRST 5K

A four-week run/walk starter plan with everyday nutrition and simple bodyweight core work.

Your first finish starts with your next small step.
Three easy run/walk sessions each week. Two short core sessions. Plenty of recovery. No pace target, gym membership, or running experience required.

What this plan is

A practical first chapter in the Couch to Marathon journey: build a movement routine and prepare for a first 5K (3.1 miles), using walking breaks from the start. This is a **5K starter guide, not marathon training**.

A realistic four-week goal

Consistency comes first. A 5K at the end is optional and depends on your starting fitness and how you recover. Walking part or all of it counts. Some beginners need substantially longer; repeat weeks rather than rush.

Inside

A 28-day calendar / effort and recovery rules / four simple core exercises / food and hydration basics / a first-5K checklist / a progress tracker.

Free starter edition 1.1 | October 2026 | Personal-use download

START HERE

Make the plan fit you

Entry check: Start Week 1 when you can walk comfortably for 30 minutes without pain, unusual breathlessness, or significant next-day fatigue. If that is not comfortable yet, build a walking base first. The four-week calendar starts after that base is in place.

If walking 30 minutes is a stretch

Begin with 5-10 minutes of comfortable walking, or less if needed. Walk on several days each week and add a few minutes only when you feel well during and after. Take as many weeks as needed to reach a comfortable 30-minute walk. Do not add running just to meet a date.

Your weekly rhythm

Monday, Wednesday, Saturday: run/walk. **Tuesday and Thursday:** short core routine; an easy walk is optional. **Friday and Sunday:** rest, or gentle everyday movement. Move days to suit your life, keeping at least one non-running day between run/walk sessions. Never make up missed sessions by stacking them.

What every session means

Warm up: 5 minutes of easy walking. **Main set:** alternate the stated jog and walk intervals; each pair is one round. **Cool down:** 5 minutes of easy walking. Listed totals include both walks. Jog slowly enough to speak in full sentences; walk more whenever you need to. The goal is controlled effort, not speed.

The progress-or-repeat rule

Advance only when all sessions felt manageable, you stayed conversational, and normal daily movement feels comfortable the next day. Otherwise repeat the week or shorten the jogging intervals. If you miss a week, return to an easier week. Walking-only sessions are always an option.

Know when to stop

Stop running for sharp or worsening pain, limping, or symptoms that do not settle with walking. Seek professional advice for persistent pain. Chest pain, fainting, confusion, or severe/unusual breathlessness require prompt medical attention. Discuss the plan with a clinician first if you have a relevant condition, current injury, concerning symptoms, or uncertainty about safe exercise.

Choose comfortable shoes, a level route, and cooler conditions. In heat or humidity, slow down, add walking breaks, and shorten or move the session indoors. Let conditions change the plan.

WEEK 01

Start small. Finish comfortable.

Always begin and end run/walk sessions with 5 minutes of walking. Totals below already include those 10 minutes.

Day	Session	What to do
Mon / Day 1	Run/walk A	6 rounds: jog 30 seconds + walk 2 minutes. **Total: 25 minutes.**
Tue / Day 2	Core + optional walk	Core: 1 round (page 7). Optional easy walk: 10-15 minutes.
Wed / Day 3	Run/walk B	Repeat Monday: 6 rounds of 30 seconds jog + 2 minutes walk. **Total: 25 minutes.**
Thu / Day 4	Core + optional walk	Core: 1 round. Optional easy walk: 10-15 minutes.
Fri / Day 5	Rest	No scheduled workout. Gentle everyday movement is fine.
Sat / Day 6	Run/walk C	8 rounds: jog 30 seconds + walk 2 minutes. **Total: 30 minutes.**
Sun / Day 7	Rest + reflect	Was your effort conversational? How did you feel the next day?

Running focus

Practice slowing down. Your jog may feel barely faster than your walk. That is enough.

One useful habit

Choose two or three realistic workout times. Put shoes and comfortable clothing where you will see them.

Nutrition focus

Eat regular meals. Add a carbohydrate food and a protein food at each main meal rather than starting a restrictive diet.

Repeat this week if the effort or recovery check on page 2 is not met. Core details: page 7. First-5K readiness: page 9.

WEEK 02

Build a repeatable rhythm.

Always begin and end run/walk sessions with 5 minutes of walking. Totals below already include those 10 minutes.

Day	Session	What to do
Mon / Day 8	Run/walk A	7 rounds: jog 45 seconds + walk 2 minutes. **Total: 29 minutes 15 seconds.**
Tue / Day 9	Core + optional walk	Core: 1 round; a second only if the first is easy. Optional walk: 10-20 minutes.
Wed / Day 10	Run/walk B	Repeat Monday: 7 rounds of 45 seconds jog + 2 minutes walk. **Total: 29 minutes 15 seconds.**
Thu / Day 11	Core + optional walk	Core: 1-2 rounds, comfortable form. Optional easy walk: 10-20 minutes.
Fri / Day 12	Rest	Let the routine settle in. Rest is part of training.
Sat / Day 13	Run/walk C	8 rounds: jog 45 seconds + walk 2 minutes; then 3 minutes easy walking. **Total: 35 minutes.**
Sun / Day 14	Rest + reflect	Repeat Week 2 if sessions felt too hard or recovery was poor.

Running focus

Keep the same relaxed effort even though the jog intervals are slightly longer. Do not add speed.

One useful habit

Pick one familiar flat route. Measure progress by consistency and comfort, not other people's pace.

Nutrition focus

Test a simple snack before one session: banana, toast, or a few crackers. Learn what feels comfortable in your stomach.

Repeat this week if the effort or recovery check on page 2 is not met. Core details: page 7. First-5K readiness: page 9.

WEEK 03

Spend a little longer moving.

Always begin and end run/walk sessions with 5 minutes of walking. Totals below already include those 10 minutes.

Day	Session	What to do
Mon / Day 15	Run/walk A	8 rounds: jog 1 minute + walk 2 minutes. **Total: 34 minutes.**
Tue / Day 16	Core + optional walk	Core: up to 2 rounds if comfortable. Optional easy walk: 10-20 minutes.
Wed / Day 17	Run/walk B	Repeat Monday: 8 rounds of 1 minute jog + 2 minutes walk. **Total: 34 minutes.**
Thu / Day 18	Core + optional walk	Core: 1-2 rounds. Keep every repetition controlled.
Fri / Day 19	Rest	No extra hard workout or missed-session catch-up.
Sat / Day 20	Run/walk C	10 rounds: jog 1 minute + walk 2 minutes. **Total: 40 minutes.** If this feels easy and you have no pain, optionally add up to 5 minutes of walking.
Sun / Day 21	Rest + readiness check	Record Saturday's time, distance, effort, and next-day comfort. Use page 9 to decide whether a 5K is appropriate.

Running focus

End with something left. If 1-minute jogs disrupt your breathing, return to 30-45 seconds or walk the whole session.

One useful habit

Notice how you recover, not just what you finish. Fatigue and pain are information, not a challenge to ignore.

Nutrition focus

Practice your normal post-session meal or snack. Include both carbohydrate and protein; no special recovery supplement is required.

Repeat this week if the effort or recovery check on page 2 is not met. Core details: page 7. First-5K readiness: page 9.

WEEK 04

Arrive fresh. Choose your finish.

Always begin and end run/walk sessions with 5 minutes of walking. Totals below already include those 10 minutes.

Day	Session	What to do
Mon / Day 22	Run/walk A	7 rounds: jog 1 minute + walk 2 minutes. **Total: 31 minutes.**
Tue / Day 23	Light core	1 easy round only. Optional 10-minute gentle walk.
Wed / Day 24	Run/walk B	6 rounds: jog 1 minute + walk 2 minutes. **Total: 28 minutes.**
Thu / Day 25	Easy movement	Optional 10-15-minute easy walk. Skip core if you feel tired or sore.
Fri / Day 26	Rest	Use familiar food, normal meals, and your usual hydration. No last-minute hard session.
Sat / Day 27	Your choice	**Ready (page 9):** attempt a relaxed 5K with planned walk breaks. **Not ready:** repeat a comfortable 30-40-minute walk/run. There is no deadline.
Sun / Day 28	Recover + celebrate	Rest or take a short gentle walk. Record what worked and choose your next repeat week.

Running focus

Reduce fatigue this week. You cannot gain extra fitness by cramming in a hard session before your first 5K.

One useful habit

Plan a route, a way to stop early, and an encouraging person to check in with. A local walk-friendly event can help.

Nutrition focus

Repeat food and drinks you already tolerated. A first 5K does not call for a marathon-style carbohydrate load.

Repeat this week if the effort or recovery check on page 2 is not met. Core details: page 7. First-5K readiness: page 9.

MOVE WITH CONTROL

Your simple core routine

Twice a week, about 8-12 minutes. A mat is optional; a stable wall or counter can help. This supports your routine without adding another hard workout.

Start with one round. Rest 20-40 seconds between exercises and about a minute between rounds. Breathe normally, move slowly, and stop before your form changes. Add a second round only when the first is comfortable. Do not progress repetitions, rounds, and hold times all at once.

Exercise	Starting dose	How to do it / make it easier
1. Supine march	5 slow lifts per side	Lie on your back, knees bent, feet down. Gently brace your abdomen. Lift one foot a few inches without rocking your pelvis; lower and switch. **Easier:** slide a heel along the floor instead.
2. Glute bridge	6 slow repetitions	From the same position, press through both feet and raise your hips until shoulders, hips, and knees roughly line up. Pause briefly; lower slowly. Avoid arching your lower back. **Easier:** use a smaller lift.
3. Bird dog preparation	4 reaches per side	On hands and knees, keep your trunk still and reach one arm forward; return, then switch. If stable, try sliding one leg back separately. **Easier:** keep fingers or toes on the floor. Add opposite arm and leg together only when steady.
4. Wall plank	2 holds of 10-15 seconds	Place forearms on a wall and step your feet back slightly. Keep a straight, comfortable line through your body; gently brace and breathe. **Easier:** stand closer. A stable counter is a later progression.

When to adjust

Mild muscle effort is fine; sharp pain, back pinching, joint pain, dizziness, or breath-holding are reasons to stop or simplify. Choose fewer repetitions rather than forcing a position. If getting down to the floor is difficult, use the wall plank and seek individualized alternatives.

Small beats exhausting

The aim is controlled movement you can repeat. Skip the session if you are unusually tired or sore. During race week, reduce to one easy round early in the week; extra soreness is not useful preparation.

EAT TO SUPPORT THE HABIT

Everyday food. Simple fueling.

These are general adult nutrition ideas, not a calorie target or a weight-loss diet. Adapt for allergies, medical needs, appetite, and foods you enjoy.

Build a reliable plate

Use carbohydrate foods for activity, protein foods for recovery, fruit or vegetables for variety, and some dietary fat. You do not need to remove a food group. Regular meals are more useful than trying to train while under-fueled.

Food role	Easy examples
Carbohydrate	Oats, bread, potatoes, pasta, fruit, or other tolerated grains.
Protein	Beans, lentils, tofu, tempeh, yogurt, eggs, fish, or other preferred protein foods.
Produce + fat	A mix of vegetables and fruit; olive oil, nuts, seeds, or avocado as tolerated.

Before a session

If you ate a normal meal in the previous few hours and feel comfortable, a short session may need no extra food. If hungry or exercising soon after waking, try a small, familiar carbohydrate snack 30-60 minutes beforehand: a banana, toast, or crackers. Allow more time after a large meal. Avoid testing a heavy, fatty, or very high-fiber meal immediately before running.

After a session

Have your next normal meal, or a snack if the meal is a while away. Pair carbohydrate with protein: yogurt and fruit, toast with nut butter, a tofu sandwich, or lentils with potatoes. There is no need to panic about a narrow recovery window after these short, easy sessions.

Water first

Drink regularly through the day and bring water when access is uncertain. For most easy sessions under an hour, water is enough; gels and sports drinks are usually unnecessary. Take comfortable sips when thirsty rather than forcing large amounts. Heat and heavy sweating change needs: shorten the session, find shade or cooler conditions, and seek personalized advice if needed.

Sample training day: Breakfast: oats, yogurt or soy yogurt, and fruit. Lunch: a hummus or tofu sandwich with vegetables. Optional pre-walk/run snack: a banana. Dinner: lentil pasta or potatoes with beans and vegetables. Adjust portions to hunger; this is an example, not a prescribed menu.

YOUR FIRST FINISH

A 5K is a distance, not a pace

Five kilometers is about 3.1 miles. Running continuously is optional. Choose a walk-friendly course or event with a generous time limit.

Attempt the full 5K only when all are true:
1. You already tolerate about 45-60 minutes of walking comfortably, or recently covered at least 4 km comfortably and recovered well.
2. Week 3 felt manageable and you have no pain, limping, or unusual fatigue.
3. You can choose a flat, cool route, use walk breaks, and stop early if needed.

If not: use Day 27 for another comfortable 30-40-minute outing. Repeat Weeks 2-4 or follow a longer beginner plan before attempting the distance.

Before you go

Check weather and the event cutoff. Use shoes, clothes, and food you have already tested. Allow enough time for breakfast to settle and use the restroom. Plan water access and a way home. Tell someone your route if going alone.

Start easier than you think

Walk gently for 5 minutes before starting. In the 5K, use the familiar pattern of **1 minute easy jogging + 2 minutes walking**, or shorter jogs and longer walks. Begin with walking if you prefer. Stay conversational; let faster people go. Ignore finish-time predictions.

Let the distance guide you, not pressure you

Track the route if you want, but do not extend a session through pain or unusual exhaustion to make the screen show 5.00 km. You may walk the whole route, shorten it, or stop. If your expected finish is longer than any outing you have comfortably tolerated, build more walking endurance first.

Afterward

Walk gently for about 5 minutes, drink normally, and eat a familiar meal or snack. Take the next day easy. Celebrate the habit as much as the distance. If pain persists or changes your normal walking, pause and get advice before resuming.

What comes next

Repeat a comfortable week until three weekly sessions feel routine. Gradually lengthen jogging intervals only when recovery is good; keep walk breaks as long as you like. A marathon is a much later project that needs a durable running base and a separate, substantially longer training plan.

KEEP THE EVIDENCE SIMPLE

Your four-week check-in

Write your actual sessions, not just your intentions. An easier session or repeated week can be the right decision.

Week	Sessions done / 3	Longest time / distance	Effort + next-day recovery
1	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	_____
4	_____	_____	_____

My next step

The habit that helped most: _____

A change I will make: _____

Next week I will repeat / progress to: _____

Why the calendar is flexible

This is an original four-week starter framework, not a validated promise of readiness. Established beginner programs often run longer; the NHS Couch to 5K plan uses nine weeks, with three run/walk sessions and recovery days. Keep the calendar flexible so progress matches your body, not a deadline.

Further reading

NHS: Couch to 5K running plan

CDC: How to measure physical activity intensity

Mayo Clinic: Eating and exercise

Mayo Clinic: Exercises to improve your core strength

Sources consulted October 24, 2026. These organizations did not review or endorse this product. General educational information; individual needs and medical advice take priority.

Copyright 2026 Just Jake. Personal use only. Keep your copy; please do not redistribute or resell it.