

Meningitis
now

Training Guide

Couch to 5k





So, you want to get into running?

Running is one of those activities that a lot of people are put off by, as without following a structured plan it can feel like you're not making progress and are always exhausted - but don't panic! By breaking your training down into manageable chunks, you'll be giving yourself a great chance of achieving your goal, whether it's embarking on a more active lifestyle, getting back into exercise after a significant period of injury or illness or running your first ever 5k. Don't be put off by something that's further ahead in the plan than you are; whatever stage you're at now, you're not expected to be where you want to be before you've even started!

This guide will talk you through everything you'll need to take you from no running at all to running for 30 minutes non-stop, including:

- Gear** What footwear and clothing to look for
- Fuel** Tips and recommendations for nutrition and hydration
- Training** Tips and guidance, plus 9-week plan to take you from couch to 5k

✉ events@meningitisnow.org
 ☎ **01453 768 000**
 🖱 www.meningitisnow.org/events

Contents

Gear	3
Fuel	4
Training	5
9 week training plan	8

Why not combine your Couch to 5k with our virtual event, Jog On Meningitis? If you raise £50 over 50 days and cover 50km in that time, you'll be helping us save lives and rebuild futures. We'll even send you a medal to honour your achievement!

Sign up at meningitisnow.org/jogon



Gear

Running is a relatively inexpensive sport that needs very little specialist kit. However, if you're in the market for new kit, here are a few considerations that will help to make your experience a good one.

Shoes

Your shoes are the one bit of gear that you should really try and get right. The initial cost might seem high, but it's completely worth the investment to avoid injuries and niggles that could affect you more than just financially. A specialist sports retailer will be able to provide you with a gait analysis to assess your running style and the way that your feet land and recommend suitable trainers. Try out a few different pairs and go for comfort over style.

Top

Your running top should be relatively close-fitting, lightweight, breathable and moisture-wicking. Mid- to top-range tops - like our Meningitis Now branded technical vests - will keep you warm or cool depending on when or how you wear them, with good air circulation and quick-dry fabric.

If the weather gets really cold or wet it's also worth investing in a good quality waterproof running jacket. Cheaper options are available, but they may not be as windproof or waterproof as more technical jackets.

Sports bra

Ladies, it's important to wear a sports bra that gives adequate support while still being comfortable. There are a lot of great sports bras around and everyone is different; you may need to try a few different options before finding the right one for you.

The ideal bra fits snugly without any bulges around the sides; the shoulder straps shouldn't dig in; and when you run there should be minimal movement.

Socks

Any sports socks will be fine, but if you're prone to blisters or prefer extra cushioning, specialist running socks are designed with more padding in certain areas (so are specific to the left or right foot) and wick moisture away from your skin.

Shorts / leggings

The length of your legwear is very much a personal choice and there are pros and cons to each style. In hot weather, shorts are great for allowing the blood in your legs to stay cooler but, depending on factors like the style and your body shape, may ride up in between your legs and cause chaffing. Leggings will keep you warmer and thus reduce the risk of injury in the cold but similarly could cause you to overheat. Either way, legwear should be comfortable, lightweight and ideally made of a Lycra and / or moisture-wicking material.

Gloves

Non-essential, but gloves can certainly help if you suffer from cold extremities. Woollen gloves will do the trick, but if you're running in the rain a lot then lightweight synthetic fabrics will dry a lot quicker. Some versions will offer waterproofing as well.

Hat

Similar to gloves, woollen - or better still, fleece - hats can help to take the chill off during the colder months. Caps also offer good protection from rain, snow and sun, especially if you wear glasses.

Fuel

There are a lot of articles and theories around nutrition and hydration, but here are a few basics that will help to aid and enhance your running experience.

Stay hydrated

You should be drinking plenty of water - around 2 litres - throughout the day anyway, but adding exercise into your routine calls for a higher water intake, with the main focus on post-workout.

Refuel - but don't overeat

A common misconception is that you can eat whatever you like after you've been for a run, but be mindful of your calorie consumption. If you find you're more hungry than usual after going for a run, first make sure that you're well hydrated and then opt for healthy snacks like fruit, nuts, rice cakes with peanut butter and homemade flapjacks.

Power up

Your body needs good quality training fuel and eating 2-3 hours before a run will ensure you have enough energy to get you through. Any sooner and you may find yourself battling with stomach pain (or worse...).

Keep it balanced

There's so much information out there about fancy diets and carb-cycling, but there's no need to overcomplicate things; as long as you're eating a balanced, healthy variety of food you will feel the benefits in your running.

If you've got a run ahead of you then you may wish to eat more carbohydrates around 12 hours beforehand; wholewheat pasta the night before a morning run is perfect as it tops up your muscles' energy stores and releases the energy steadily rather than all in one go and then causing your blood sugar to crash.



Training

Health checklist

Before you get stuck in with your training, it's a good idea to make sure there aren't any medical reasons why you shouldn't take on an exercise programme. Have a look at the checklist below and if you answer 'Yes' to some or all of the questions and you have any concerns, we advise you to make an appointment with your GP and request a check-up.

If you answer 'No' to all of these questions or have the all-clear from your GP, it's time to get going!

	YES	NO
Are you aged over 30 and / or haven't exercised for some time?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you suffer from any medical conditions?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you smoke, or have you recently given up?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you undergone any surgery in the past two years?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you currently suffering from any injuries?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you currently take any prescribed medication?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you unsure about beginning an exercise programme?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

When to run

Everyone has a preferred time to exercise and ultimately, there is no right or wrong time as long as it works for you. It doesn't even have to be the same time each time; just make sure that you're giving your body enough time to rest and recover between sessions.

Where to run

Generally speaking, nowhere is out of bounds, whether you stay indoors on the treadmill or run outdoors on the pavements, roads, paths and parks. Just be aware that the transition from treadmill to outdoors can be tricky, as treadmills provide a completely flat surface and a consistent pace that aren't reflective of outdoor conditions.

Training

Structuring your sessions

To get the most out of your running, you should follow correct exercise protocols before and after every session to avoid injury.

1. Warm up

Each session on the Couch to 5k starts with a brisk walk to raise your heart rate, get blood flowing to your muscles and prepare your body and mind to the exercise that you're about to undertake.

Warming up is good practice for any physical activity. Think of your muscles as a piece of Blu Tack; if you try to use them when they're cold they will be much less effective, whereas slowly warming and manipulating them first will make them much easier to work with.

2. Main session

This is the bulk of your training session; in the earlier stages you'll be alternating running and walking, and as the plan progresses you'll be running for longer periods of time.

3. Cool down

As with the warm-up, our Couch to 5k sessions finish with a brisk 5-10 minute walk. This will bring your heart rate and body temperature back down steadily to flush waste by-products from your muscles and tissues to allow for a much faster recovery.

4. Flexibility

Stretch it out! Your muscles should be nicely relaxed following your run and stretching properly will help you avoid cramp, muscle tears and stiffness. Spend 5 to 10 minutes in total.

Top tip:

Need some inspiration? Check out the videos on our Training Hub by Meningitis Now's resident runner and qualified personal trainer, Rachel, for some great flexibility exercises.



Training

Training notes

The Couch to 5k training plan is a 9-week programme that involves three runs per week, and creates the perfect foundation upon which you can build if you want to take up running regularly. If you're brand new to running it can all seem a bit daunting, but take each day of the plan as it comes and remember these tips:

Take it steady

Don't feel that speed or distance need to be the focus of your sessions as these will come naturally over time. Couch to 5k is all about building up the amount of time that you're running for; the distance you cover in that time and the speed at which you run don't matter.

Have a rest

It's really important to take your rest days to allow your joints to recover and your muscles to repair and strengthen. There's at least one rest day between each session on the plan; don't be tempted to skip these, even if you're feeling fine. That said, if you want to take part in another form of exercise (including stretching) that doesn't involve running on your rest days, it can help to improve your stamina.

Top tip:

Tick off each session after you complete it; it's a great, visual way of seeing how much you've achieved. You've got this!

Stay positive

The Couch to 5k plan is designed to build you up from not running at all to running for 30 minutes non-stop. Have faith in your training - there may be some sessions that you don't think you'll be able to manage but you can do it! Try to keep a positive mindset and find ways to distract yourself while you're running - for instance, focus on your reason for doing this. If you're finding it really difficult, you can repeat any of the weeks until you feel physically ready to move on.

Help reduce the risks

Sometimes, new runners can suffer from pains in their calf muscles and shins. These pains are usually caused by running on hard surfaces if you're not used to them, or by running in shoes that don't have enough support.

It's really important to warm up before you start running, and also to have the correct footwear (take a look at our notes on page 3). If you're still suffering, extend your rest period until the pain subsides to prevent further damage and treat as you would for a common minor injury.



Training plan - Couch to 5k

	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3
MONDAY	5 min walk 8 x (1 min run, 90 secs walk) 5 min walk	5 min walk 6 x (90 secs run, 2 mins walk) 5 min walk	5 min walk 2 x (90 secs run, 90 secs walk) 3 min run, 3 min walk 5 min walk
TUESDAY	Rest	Rest	Rest
WEDNESDAY	5 min walk 8 x (1 min run, 90 secs walk) 5 min walk	5 min walk 6 x (90 secs run, 2 mins walk) 5 min walk	5 min walk 2 x (90 secs run, 90 secs walk) 3 min run, 3 min walk 5 min walk
THURSDAY	Rest	Rest	Rest
FRIDAY	Rest	Rest	Rest
SATURDAY	5 min walk 8 x (1 min run, 90 secs walk) 5 min walk	5 min walk 6 x (90 secs run, 2 mins walk) 5 min walk	5 min walk 2 x (90 secs run, 90 secs walk) 3 min run, 3 min walk 5 min walk
SUNDAY	Rest	Rest	Rest

	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6
MONDAY	5 min walk 3 mins run, 90 secs walk, 5 mins run, 2.5 mins walk, 3 mins run, 90 secs walk, 5 mins run 5 min walk	5 min walk 5 mins run, 3 mins walk, 5 mins run, 3 mins walk, 5 mins run 10 min walk	5 min walk 5 mins run, 3 mins walk, 8 mins run, 3 mins walk, 5 mins run 10 min walk
TUESDAY	Rest	Rest	Rest
WEDNESDAY	5 min walk 3 mins run, 90 secs walk, 5 mins run, 2.5 mins walk, 3 mins run, 90 secs walk, 5 mins run 5 min walk	5 min walk 8 mins run, 5 mins walk, 8 mins run 10 min walk	5 min walk 10 mins run, 3 mins walk, 10 mins run 10 min walk
THURSDAY	Rest	Rest	Rest
FRIDAY	Rest	Rest	Rest
SATURDAY	5 min walk 3 mins run, 90 secs walk, 5 mins run, 2.5 mins walk, 3 mins run, 90 secs walk, 5 mins run 5 min walk	5 min walk 20 mins run 10 min walk	5 min walk 25 mins run 10 min walk
SUNDAY	Rest	Rest	Rest

Training plan - Couch to 5k

	WEEK 7	WEEK 8	WEEK 9
MONDAY	5 min walk 25 mins run 5 min walk	5 min walk 28 mins run 5 min walk	5 min walk 30 mins run 5 min walk
TUESDAY	Rest	Rest	Rest
WEDNESDAY	5 min walk 25 mins run 5 min walk	5 min walk 28 mins run 5 min walk	5 min walk 30 mins run 5 min walk
THURSDAY	Rest	Rest	Rest
FRIDAY	Rest	Rest	Rest
SATURDAY	5 min walk 25 mins run 5 min walk	5 min walk 28 mins run 5 min walk	5 min walk 30 mins run 5 min walk
SUNDAY	Rest	Rest	Rest

Congratulations!

Completing Couch to 5k is a massive achievement and gives you a great foundation that you can build upon if you wish.

Don't stop here - why not try out our 10km training guide?

