

How Can I Get Started on a Walking or Running Program for Myself?



One of the many benefits of walking or running is that you can do it on your own (no gym membership required!) with personal discipline and just a little guidance. To take care of the latter, here is the 12-week “self-paced” training schedule that “First Strides” uses with great success. Just follow this gradual, progressive program, and you, too, will be able to complete a 5-K (5 kilometers or 3.1 miles) in three short months.

If you experience any persistent muscle or tendon soreness that doesn’t go away with stretching, ice massage, and/or rest, stop the program and try to determine the cause. Your local specialty running store is usually an excellent resource for advice on typical injuries experienced by walkers and runners (such injuries are often related to improper or improperly fitted footwear—something they can certainly help with). They also can recommend sports-related physicians in your area.

Sample Workout

- Warm-up with 5 minutes of easy walking or jogging
- Stretch
- Do the Easy;Hard workout described in the schedule below
- Cool down with 5 minutes of easy walking or jogging
- Stretch

Definitions (see chart headings below)

■ **Easy; Hard** refers to your effort. This is the actual workout. For some people, “easy” will be a very slow stroll, and “hard” will be a faster walk. For others, “easy” may mean a comfortable walk and “hard,” power walking. For still others, “easy” may mean a brisk walk and “hard,” a jog. Some will jog and pick it up to a run. The beauty of this program is that it accommodates all abilities because it’s based on minutes of activity, not distance or speed.

■ **Reps** means repetitions, or, the number of times you repeat the Easy;Hard minutes.

■ **Total Easy** and **Total Hard** are listed only to show you the gradual progression of the activity. The “easy” gets shorter, the “hard” gets longer. The result is your improvement!

■ **Total Time*** is the time of the Easy;Hard portion of the workout. It does not include the mandatory 5-minute warm-up before starting the Easy;Hard portion of the workout or the 5-minute cool down after the Easy;Hard workout (see Sample Workout above).

■ **Warm-up** means a comfortable (relative to your ability) walk or easy jog to get your muscles warmed up.

Cool down is a similar pace that gradually eases you back to ending the workout or complete rest.

■ **Stretching** is an important part of your workout. It prepares your muscles for activity and helps avoid injuries from over-use. Incorporate some stretches that stretch your calves, your hamstrings, and your back between the warm-up and Easy;Hard workout and again after your cool down ... before you jump in the car to drive home or flop on the couch! (See Sample Workout above)

■ **Frequency** refers to the number of times per week you do that week’s workout. In the first five weeks, a frequency of 3 means you should get out there every other day for three days of activity in a seven-day week. It’s always best to alternate workout days with rest days. Rest days are days in which you do nothing physical or participate in an activity other than running or brisk walking, such as swimming, bicycling, strength-training, golf—you get the picture.

“First Strides” Training Schedule

Week	Easy;Hard	Reps	Total Easy + Total Hard = Total Time*		Frequency	
	in minutes	repetitions	minutes	minutes	total # min	workouts/week
1	4:1	3	12	3	15	3
2	4:2	3	12	6	18	3
3	3:2	4	12	8	20	3
4	3:3	4	12	12	24	3
5	2:3	5	10	15	25	3
6	3:4	4	12	16	28	4
7	2:4	5	10	20	30	4
8	1:4	6	6	24	30	4
9	1:5	6	6	30	36	4
10	1:7	5	5	35	40	4
11	1:9	4	4	36	40	5
12	1:10	4	4	40	44	5

* This time does not include the mandatory 5-minute warm-up and stretch, and 5-minute cool down and stretch

How Can I Find a Beginner's Walk/Run Program Near Me?

While there is no national provider of running or walking programs specifically for beginners, many communities offer their own. Contact the following resources for programs or referrals in your area:

Road Runners Club of America (RRCA)

<http://www.rrca.org/members/>

Check this national association of grassroots running club chapters' website for a list of clubs in your area. Then contact the clubs to see if they have any programs that help you start a walking or running program. And don't let the word "run" in the title stop you from calling. Clubs often welcome walkers!!!

US Track & Field Association (USATF)

<http://www.usatf.org/clubs/search/>

This is the website for the national governing body for track & field, long-distance running, and race walking. Don't let the words "track & field" in the title scare you. The clubs are independent and vary greatly. Some are more beginner-friendly than others.

Yellow Pages

www.yellowpages.com

Look for local community centers, health clubs, YMCA/YWCA, physical fitness facilities or specialty running store listings, and call to find out if they offer beginner's programs or can refer you to one in your area.

Specialty Running Stores

<http://www.runnersworld.com/home/0,1300,1-52-167-1048,00.html>

Local retailers who specialize in running and walking are usually familiar with resources for beginners in the area. In fact, some offer programs through their stores. But even if they don't, these generally smaller stores are a wonderful resource for personal advice on shoe selection and injury prevention. Plus, if you encourage the owners to contact "First Strides," we can help them start a program in your area. It will be great for their business—and a fabulous resource for you.



National Recreation & Parks Association

http://www.nrpa.org/story.cfm?story_id=193&departmentID=37&publicationID=11

This association promotes public awareness and support for recreation, park, and leisure services. Check the list of affiliated state organizations on their website to determine if there are any community centers and recreation programs near you.

How Can I Start a "First Strides" Program in My Area?

If you would like to start or encourage your specialty retailer, running club, or community center to begin a "First Strides" program or similar beginner's class in your area, contact Jane Serues. Jane and her colleagues can make the creation of a program in your community easier by passing along the lessons they have learned through their 7-year experience with the "First Strides" program.

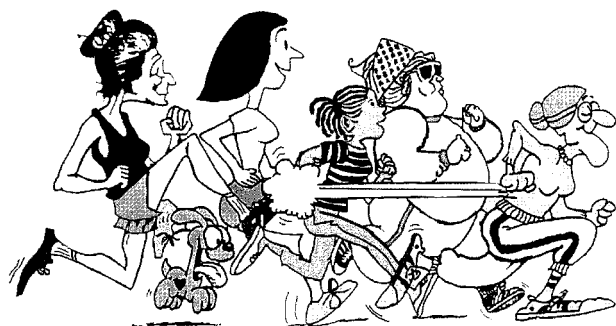
Key elements of the "First Strides" program include:

■ **Goal** – Each "First Strides" program ends in a goal event, such as an all-female 5-K (5-kilometer or 3.1-mile) run and/or walk.

■ **Education** – Basic "how to" information is provided through speakers and/or informational handouts on a range of topics including training principles, injury prevention, proper shoe selection, safety, dealing with the elements (heat & cold), nutrition, motivation, and incontinence.

■ **Training Schedule** – The "First Strides" workout program is a gradual, progressive, self-paced, time-based workout program that accommodates a wide range of abilities.

■ **Mentors** – The "First Strides" program involves experienced walkers and runners of all ages, shapes, and abilities to help inspire and organize participants.



For consulting support or licensing opportunities, contact:

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