

# Advantage Africa

## Some Running Tips for Beginners

**Set a tangible goal** like running an organised 5k or 10k event. Register for the race, and it will serve as your motivation to get in shape and keep your training regular and consistent. Whether this is your first race or you are getting back into shape running a 5k or 10k is a great way to succeed at learning to run and earn a medal too!

**Start with where you ARE**, rather than where you want to be. Learning to run will take some time, but if you start with your current activity level you will progress a lot faster and have more fun along the way. If you have been inactive, begin with a walking program or by sprinkling in short running intervals of 30 seconds to 1 minute followed by 3-4 minutes of powerwalking.

**Listen to your body** while you train. Pay close attention to what your body tells you. Listen to yourself honestly. If you've been fatigued or sore for several days in a row, then you may need to schedule in some rest and recovery time. Persistent pain for several weeks usually doesn't just go away. Usually, it gets worse. It is always better to deal with these types of problems as early as possible, rather than wait until they grow into something serious. Furthermore, the body actually grows stronger when you are resting. So training is a process that includes strategically placed workouts and rest days to allow your body to be stimulated by the activity and then recover during the rest. Many people make the mistake of over training and running too much, too soon and end up with an injury. It doesn't have to be the case though if you listen to your body for aches and pains or just fatigue. If your body is giving you a warning ache, take an extra day off and adjust your training to allow full recovery. Additional ways to improve recovery include getting plenty of sleep and eating frequent, well-balanced meals throughout the day.

**Follow the three-week rule.** Practice patience. Getting active takes time. It takes 21 days to create a new habit. Running regularly will become a habit over time. A body that is active will want to stay active. A body that is inactive will want to stay inactive. The first 3 weeks is the most challenging. Make it a priority in your life and you'll find 3-4 weeks later you will wonder how you managed without being active.

**Pace Yourself.** Learn to pace yourself while running. Mark out a 1-mile course in your neighborhood and teach yourself to run at various speeds. It will teach you how to run or walk at different gears and will be a very useful tool for race day. It is easy to go out too fast in the first few minutes and having well honed pacing skills will help you go farther.

**Shopping for running shoes** can be fun. Go to a specialist running shop to get fitted out with the right shoes for your running style, but be aware that such stores are not usually the cheapest place to buy your shoes.

**Food is fuel.** You are what you eat. Your runs and walks are fueled by the food you eat every day. If you make a note of what you consume daily it will give you a better perspective of what goes into your system. If you are having trouble dropping the weight you wanted or just not feeling strong while running, it could have something to do with how you fuel your body day to day. Eat smaller, more frequent meals well balanced with fruits, veggies, lean protein and even fats too. Skipping meals is the quickest way to gain weight and decrease the performance of your next run or walk. Think of your car and how it runs. If you run out of fuel, the car simply doesn't move. If you put dirty fuel into the tank, the car doesn't run efficiently. Food is fuel. Fuel well for your next performance.

**Drink an adequate amount of water.** It is amazing how much more energy a person has and how much further you can run when you're hydrated properly.

**Mix up your routine** by doing a bit of cycling, swimming or other exercise – this is called cross training. Variety works a lot more muscle groups and keeps your workouts fresh and motivating. Alternating a run day with a cross-training day also allows your body time to adapt and recover from each run.

**Build a strong foundation.** Including strength training exercises for your upper body, core (abdomen, torso, hips, low back) and lower body twice per week for 8-12 repetitions builds strength in your musculature, tendons and joints. Developing strength supports your body as you run mile after mile. It will also improve efficiency and form while decreasing the risk of developing an overuse injury.

**Stay motivated by keeping a log.** Track your progress along the way. Write down your running time, mileage, and even mood! Every run or walk is a piece of the puzzle that will be completed at the finish line. Train with a buddy and make a commitment to meet them regularly. Run with a group or train with a team for charity. If all else fails you and you are struggling with motivation, think about how you feel after you complete each training session, and then how you feel if you skip a session. Commit to a shorter session and just get started. In most cases, once you get into the first 10 minutes you will complete the workout and feel great.

**Keep it fun.** The more fun it is, the more you will want to do it again. Schedule a session with a friend, take a new route and try something new.

**Avoid doing too much, too soon.** New runners often feel great starting a new training schedule or workout routine and want to jump right in! Doing too much too soon can lead to injuries. Start easy and increase your mileage by no more than 10% per week. You'll be injury free and happier in the long run.

**When going uphill** shorten your stride, maintain a straight back, strong abs, and the same pace while keeping your eyes up to help you get over the top. Swing your arms and look up to bring plenty of air into your lungs.

**Do some stretches** before and after if you have time but be sure to jog lightly for 5-10 minutes to warm up your muscles before you stretch. Stretching cold muscles can lead to injury, so warming up first is important. If you're pressed for time, wait and stretch after you run. Stretching after you run is more beneficial for your increased flexibility since your blood is flowing and muscles are warm. A good stretching routine will enhance your performance through increased flexibility and stride length.

**Rest and recovery** days are important to your training. Rest days should be spread out and not taken consecutively. Recovery days such as easy short runs, easy long runs, or easy cross training days should be just that, easy!

**Consider a schedule if your busy life allows.** There are schedules to help you train for a 5km race like the Big Fun Run which you can find on the internet. Most of these suggest a 20-30 minute walk/run session three well-spaced times a week increasing the distance as race day approaches.

**Finally, remember** that while there may be many people who finish the race ahead of you it's your own personal goals that matter - whether that be to get round without stopping, run through the pain that you will inevitably experience on the day of your event, achieve a certain time or raise a target amount of money for Advantage Africa. At the end of the race you will certainly be fitter, and through the sponsorship of your friends and family, you will have helped disadvantaged people in Africa move towards their goal of a better life - and that will have made it all worthwhile.