

# How to start running to stay fit

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Running is a fantastic workout. It burns fat, improves heart function and strengthens bones.

Yet, that first step out the door in a new pair of running shoes might seem intimidating. It can also cause injury if you're not properly prepared.

That's why it's helpful to know the basics about beginning this more intense exercise routine.

"Too many people get injured running because they throw their sneakers on, walk to the end of the block and start running. The body must be primed and readied for exercise," said Dr. Russell Camhi, who works in primary sports medicine at Northwell Health Orthopaedic Institute at East Meadow, in New York.

## **The health benefits of running**

Running is credited with offering many positive health outcomes. Any amount of running was associated with a lower risk of early death, according to the [Cleveland Clinic](#), which cited a [study](#) that pooled data from 14 other studies.

"It's a great cardiovascular exercise because it takes a lot of work for you to move through space with that quick repetitive kind of motion," said Cleveland Clinic's Dr. Dominic King. "There's a lot of work done by your quads, by your gluteal muscles and by your core to keep you upright. Running is kind of coordinated falling, so it's actually a pretty complex mechanism for the body."

Health experts are divided on whether frequent distance running, such as for marathons, is beneficial or damaging to the heart, according to the American Heart Association.

Yet movement in general, including running at shorter distances, offers a lot more benefits than sitting on the couch.

It has emotional benefits, too, made famous as the euphoric "runner's high." That has long been attributed to endorphins, but [Johns Hopkins Medicine](#) attributes it to mood-improving neuromodulators called endocannabinoids that reduce anxiety and promote calm feelings.

Running—and all cardiovascular exercise—may also spark growth of nourishing [new blood vessels](#), produce new brain cells, blunt physical and emotional stress, elevate mood and improve cognitive function.

A study published recently in the [Journal of Applied Physiology](#) found that regularly power walking or jogging four to five days a week improved blood flow to the brain.

## **How to start running**

Start with a good pair of shoes.

Camhi recommends new runners avoid minimalist shoes because of the potential for poor running mechanics in those just starting out, which can lead to injury.

Choose a name brand shoe and spend about \$50 to \$100, he suggests.

"There are many ways to enter a running program. If someone has not been running in a long time, then it would be beneficial to start with walk-jog-run intervals," Camhi said.

Walk a block, jog a block, run a block and repeat several times.

While experts previously thought simple stretching was good to do before running, research has shown a dynamic warmup is better, Camhi said.

"These can be done in five minutes or less. It is simple body weight exercises such as air squats, lunges and jumping jacks to activate the legs muscles, to prepare them for running," Camhi explained.

Work out three or four days a week, but not consecutively, suggests the [Cleveland Clinic](#). Build in rest days.

Proper running form should include a focus on posture, suggests the nonprofit organization [Livestrong](#). Imagine having your head pulled up by a string tied to its top, keeping the head neutral, shoulders back and chest up. Lean slightly forward starting at the ankles, swing arms at the side at a 90-degree angle and don't clench your fists.

How to breathe while running? Certain techniques can help get more oxygen into the body, according to the [American Lung Association](#) (ALA).

It works this way: inhale. Your belly will rise. Your diaphragm will descend so you can fill your lungs.

Another technique, called rhythmic breathing, involves timing inhalation more for when the foot hits the ground, and training so that the impact shifts from the right foot to the left, according to the ALA.

## **How to start a consistent running routine**

Cleveland Clinic suggests setting goals and having rewards to stay motivated. Signing up for a race can be motivating for some.

"For those trying to increase their overall distance, I recommend the '10% rule,'" Camhi said. "Increase mileage by 10% per week to gradually increase demand on the body."

Join a [training program](#) to build stamina and gradually increase mileage, the [Mayo Clinic](#) suggests.

## The most common running mistakes to avoid

Improper shoes and bad posture are two big problems, according to Kaiser Permanente.

Choose shoes with good support, suggests a recent [HealthDay](#) story that notes a report from Rice University in Houston that found shoes lose 30% to 40% of shock-absorbing ability after 500 miles of use.

Strike with the front of the foot rather than the heel while running to avoid inefficient foot strike, Kaiser Permanente suggests.

For Camhi, running too far, too fast tops the list of potential mistakes.

"Don't plan your second run two days after your first, as that is when muscle soreness is peaking," Camhi said. "Start low and go slow is a good motto when it comes to starting a new running program."

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