5 Easy Steps to Becoming a Runner

Whether you want to run a mile or a marathon, here are some basic training rules you should follow to make good progress and avoid injury:

1. Start slow and easy. If you're not a big runner already, start by walking with short running intervals mixed in. For example, walk for four minutes then jog for 60 seconds, then return to walking for another four minutes, etc. Do this cycle three times, for a total of fifteen minutes. Do this at least three days a week. (On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, for example.) Then the next week, walk for three minutes, run for two, walk for three, etc. Each week replace one minute of the walking time with one minute of running. After four weeks you will be ready to run for 15 minutes non-stop. Depending on your speed, this means you are now running continuously for anywhere from one mile up to perhaps two!

2. Work at a sustainable level. "Level-of-effort" means the amount of energy you're spending in moving your body along. It can be measured several ways.

- One way is heart rate. This is an *objective* measurement, meaning it doesn't depend on your opinion.

- A *subjective* way would be to simply go by how it feels to you. (It should not feel "really easy" and it should also not feel "really hard", but somewhere in between. Let's call it "fairly hard".)

- A third, *practical* guideline is this: you should be able to talk during the activity but not sing. If you can't carry on a conversation while on a training run then your level-of-effort is a bit too high, so slow down. But if you can easily sing, you should run a little harder.

3. Add a little at a time. A good rule of thumb is don't increase your mileage (or running time) by more than 10% per week. Don't worry about making big gains all at once. Small gains are actually much better. They will still add up to significant increases fairly quickly, but you are much less likely to get injured that way.

4. Always warm-up / exercise / cool-down / stretch (in that order). Don't attempt to stretch when your muscles are cold – it won't help and could lead to injury. Warm-up by walking before running, and cool-down by walking again after you're done running. *Then* you should stretch, when your muscles are warm and your blood is flowing. (Talk to your P.E. teacher about specific stretches for runners.)

5. Build up to a healthy level of exercise. The U.S. Government now recommends that healthy persons try to get 45 minutes of exercise a day, on most days of the week. That's a good fitness goal to aim for. This level of physical activity will be good for your cardio-vascular fitness (your "heart health"), your energy level (exercise actually *gives* you energy), your mental health (exercise puts you in a good mood), and it will also help you reach and maintain a healthy body weight.

Good luck, and remember—sweat is your friend!