

Get Fit to Run

By Dr Monica Green

Dr Monica Green is a GP, Knowle resident, keen club runner and previous Knowle Fun Run Trophy winner. Here is her advice on getting fit for the Fun Run.



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NEW TO RUNNING?

Many new runners make the mistake of setting impractical expectations! While goal setting is encouraged, it's important to be realistic. Building your fitness is a gradual process, and you'll get there with time and patience.

When you're first starting out, don't feel discouraged if you have to take frequent breaks to walk, drink water or catch your breath. This is all a part of building up your fitness, and if you stick with it you'll improve. Try 5 minutes of running and 2 minutes of walking. Do this for 30 minutes initially, but if you can't keep it going for that long, don't worry, just do as much as you can.

Instead of worrying about running "X" amount of miles, try running by time rather than distance. Start with a run/walk routine, and gradually add time as you build your fitness. When you are ready, increase the length of your workouts and don't push too hard. Don't increase your run time by more than 10% each week, this way you will reduce your chance of injury.

WARM UP

Warming up helps to improve performance and reduces the risk of injury. One study found that just five minutes of warm up enabled runners to exercise for longer than those who just launched straight in. It should raise your body temperature and heart rate. A rise in temperature helps the haemoglobin (oxygen-carrying molecules in the blood) to release oxygen to your muscle cells. It also makes your muscles and connective tissues more pliable. Raising your heart rate increases the flow of blood to working muscles. At rest muscles receive only 15% of the blood circulating around the body. During vigorous exercise, like running, this increases to 80%. Trying to run at speed without a prior warm up doesn't allow time for the body to reroute all this blood, so your muscles will not be able to work as efficiently.

There is mixed evidence about the benefits of stretching before exercise.

Here are 3 suggested stages to warming up:

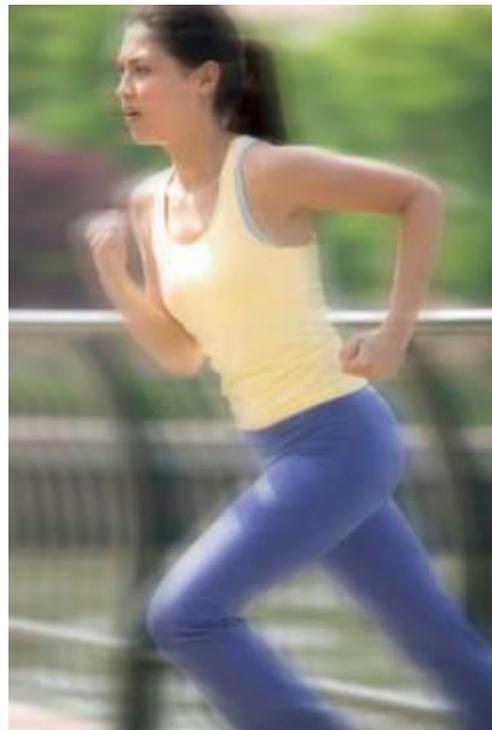
1. Firstly mobilise the joints to prepare them for movement e.g. (perform each exercise 8 times)
 - a) Tilt your ear towards your shoulder, keeping the opposite shoulder relaxed, and then move head from side to side.
 - b) Rotate your shoulders up keeping your arms down and roll them backwards and down again.
 - c) Keeping feet shoulder width apart, gently twists the upper body from side to side, looking over your shoulder as you do so.
 - d) Now slide your hand down the outside of your thigh pulling your upper body with you. Then drop to the other side.

- e) Next , keeping feet shoulder width apart, rest your hands on your hips and draw a large imaginary circle with your hips 4 times then change direction.
 - f) Next, pull one knee gently up towards the chest, hold, release and then lift the other knee. On the final lift circle the ankle 4 times in each direction.
 - g) Finish by dropping your head to your chest and bending down through your spine with knees slightly bent and tummy tight, until you reach the ground. Pause and then roll back up to standing position slowly.
2. Next we want to raise the heart rate by jogging slowly, gradually increasing speed and range of movement for 5-8 minutes.
3. Running specific activity.
- If you want to stretch, this is when to do it. If not, there are some running specific exercises that are worth doing.
- a) Prone kicks. This helps to get the knee joint lubricated without impact. Lie face-down, on your tummy with your head resting on your hands. Slowly bend alternate knees kicking your heels towards you bum, then back towards the floor. Continue this for 1-2 mins.
 - b) Hamstring swings. This puts the hip through a full range of movement without impact. Standing up, bend one knee up to hip height then straighten it back behind you. It helps to hold onto something on the side to stop you from falling over! Do 20 on each side.

Now your body is ready to run!!

HOW FAST SHOULD I RUN?

Although it's not impossible, you're most likely not going to set any speed records when you're just starting out! If you recognize this beforehand, you're less likely to get upset if you can't run as fast as you'd like! Remember, everyone has to start somewhere, and the most important thing is to take care of your body. A good gauge of pace is whether or not you are able to carry out a conversation. If you are struggling, you are probably running too fast. When it comes to picking up the pace, remember to take a sensible approach in order to reduce your risk of injury. Speedwork can be more intense than regular running, and can put a greater strain on the body. New runners should expect to be sore for a day or two following a faster, more intense workout. Be prepared and make sure you stretch after your run to avoid injury.



DIFFERENT TYPES OF TRAINING

It is important to try different types of work out to help improve your performance but also to prevent boredom!! Doing the same 3 mile route at the same pace 3 times a week will get incredibly tiresome after a couple of weeks and not result in any improvement, so decreasing your motivation.

Keep motivated. Try to do 3 different types of run in 1 week choosing from the following:

1. Steady run. Effort of about 7/10 (or 70% of maximum heart rate). Totally aerobic and conversational for as long as you wish e.g. 30-45 mins.
2. Threshold running. Effort of 8-8.5/10 (or 80-85% of maximum heart rate). This is the most important fitness element in your training. It is the key to better running economy. You are still working aerobically, but only just, and you should be able to speak 3-4 words maximum at a time. Initially you may not be able to run for very long, but an example would be a slower pace warm up for 5-10 minutes, and then 20 minutes of threshold followed by a 5-10 minute slower pace warm down.
3. Interval training. More than 8.5/10 (or >85% maximum heart rate) This involves intervals of faster running with recovery jog or walk. You may have heard of fartlek training which is a form of interval training also. An example is a warm up slow run of 10mins, then 400metres run at 85% of your fastest pace with 2-3 minutes recovery jog, repeating 4-6 times (initially 3 may be the maximum you can do). Then a 10 mins slow run warm down. Depending on your fitness level you could increase the fast part to 800m but there is not much point in running further than 1000m at a time because you will not be able to keep up the pace that is needed. You could run variable distances of fast bursts, or do it all by time eg 2 mins fast, 3 mins jog. It helps to have a plan before you start and try to stick to it.
4. Hill running. 8.5/10 (or 85% maximum heart rate). This involves running up a hill (or gradient on a treadmill) for 45-60 seconds at a steady threshold effort, and jogging back down, then straight back up! Repeat 4-6 times. A 5-10 minute slow run before and after is a good idea to complete the work out.
5. Long run. 6.5/10 (or 65% of maximum heart rate). This is only really needed if you are training for a long race eg half marathon, or marathon. It improves your muscular endurance and conditions your body to burn fat as its primary source of fuel.
6. Recovery run 6/10 (60 % of maximum heart rate). This is exactly what it suggests. Should be no more than 30-45 mins with the objective of feeling better at the end, flushing the system through, working totally with oxygen and being able to chat easily at all times.

Obviously other exercise will help your fitness. Cycling, swimming, crosstraining, walking, team sports, whatever you feel like all help to keep your body in good condition.

COOL DOWN and STRETCH

Your run is over and the last thing you want to do is cool-down, but this is very important to prevent injury. While there is less evidence to support cooling down than there is to warming up, it makes sense not to stop suddenly after a run, particularly a fast one. Once you have finished, spend a few

minutes jogging slowly before breaking into a walk. Your muscles are warm and it is time to stretch. This keeps your muscles and joints flexible. The more inflexible you are, the more likely you will get injured. Stretching also helps to flush out waste products from your muscles and ultimately will help you relax and reflect on your session. You should stretch your muscles until you feel tension and a slight pulling sensation on the muscle, but not pain. Hold the position for 20-30 seconds and repeat each stretch 2-4 times. I cannot go into a full stretch regime in this article, but it is important to stretch each muscle group of your legs particularly, but don't ignore your upper body also.

STRENGTH TRAINING

One other important aspect of training is strength training. This is your 'core stability' ie the muscles in the middle of the body. These are the deep abdominal muscles, muscles of your buttocks and lower back. If these muscles are kept strong you are at much less risk of injury. If they are not strong enough your body uses other muscles which are much weaker to help and these muscles will get over-use injuries. For example if your gluts (buttock muscles) are too weak to keep your pelvis in the right position while running, your hamstrings (muscles at the back of your upper legs) try to compensate. These become shorter and tighter and are more likely to tear, especially when you try that sprint finish!

How do you know if you have good 'core stability'? One exercise to test them is to stand with your back against a wall, with your feet approximately 7.5 cm away from the wall, hip-width apart. Try to lift one leg off the ground without tipping or sliding to one side and without tensing up. The more stable and upright you remain, the better your core stabilisers are working. Another test is to lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the ground. Lift your pelvis off the floor making sure the hip bones stay level with each other. Now keeping everything still, straighten one leg without letting the bottom drop or the pelvis tilt to either side. You may find you can stabilise better on one side than the other.

I suggest you look up a website or running book for some examples of core exercises, the plank is one. They are very simple, some need no equipment and you can do them 2 or 3 nights a week on the living room floor while watching television! It will take 10 or 15 minutes. Do some simple stretching after and you have reduced your risk of injury with hardly any effort!

NUTRITION and REST

Remember with all this increase in activity you will need to make sure you are eating well. You may be hoping to lose some weight, but remember if you lose it too quickly by not refuelling properly, you will only get too fatigued to keep up the level of activity. This can lead to deteriorating performance and frustration at seeing no improvement which can lead to decreased motivation. Fatigue can also lower your immunity putting you at greater risk of infections and illness which will mean you are not well enough to train. A sensible healthy diet containing protein, carbohydrates, and fat in moderate portions, and plenty of fruit and vegetables is all that is needed. Some people

like to take some food supplements especially protein supplements after a particularly hard workout, or vitamin supplements, but they are not necessary for the majority of normal every day fun runners!

Make sure you get plenty of fluid, water is usually sufficient, unless you are doing endurance running when an isotonic sports drink may be helpful. If it is hot and you are sweating you will need to replace all this excess fluid, so make sure you rehydrate after your run. For shorter runs you don't necessarily need to drink during the run itself unless it is very hot, but some people like to keep drinking during exercise which is fine. There is evidence that caffeine is useful and can help performance and endurance, so a cup of tea/coffee before the fun run would be a good idea! Don't overhydrate before the fun run, otherwise you will need the toilet half way round!!

With all this extra exercise hopefully you will sleep well. Rest is just as important as exercise. Your muscles repair themselves during periods of rest, so at least one day rest a week is sensible, unless you are Mo Farah!

RACE DAY PREPARATION

With all that training, you will want to do your best on the day! Obviously you don't want to do a hard training session the day before the race, but a gentle run a day or 2 before will keep your legs



supple. The day before the race, make sure the clothes you are going to run in are washed and ready to wear. Use the trainers you have been training in, this is not the day to try some new ones! Have a sensible meal the night before, pasta is a big favourite for runners because of the amount of carbohydrate in it, that is supposed to help sustain you with energy for the next day. I have got into the habit of having chicken with pesto and pasta and a small salad the day before any race. Make sure you keep well hydrated the day before and avoid doing anything too energetic if possible! Try to have a good night's sleep so that you wake up fresh and ready for your run. A breakfast that will sustain you throughout the morning is a good idea, Paula Radcliff's pre-race breakfast was a big bowl of porridge and a banana. Remember a cup of tea or coffee is supposed to be helpful because the caffeine should not only give you an energy boost, but apparently helps with the absorption of the nutrients from breakfast also. Not

too many drinks though, or else you will need the loo half way through! Get to the race well in time to get your number and chip. There is little parking at the event, so it is worth walking up and this will also help get your legs ready. There is often a pre-race warm up which you can join in or do your

own. Line up when you are called, remember to stand in the correct colour zone, this is on your number and when the hooter goes off you go! Your chip will only start to time you when you cross the start line, so you don't need to worry if it seems to take a while before you even get there. Good luck!

I hope this advice is useful, and it gets you in the mood to enter the Fun Run. The atmosphere is always fantastic, it is a brilliant community event. Enjoy the cheers as you run/jog/walk the route. If you are not running it, get out there and support the runners, it really helps! Maybe it will encourage you to try it next year! Remember to ENJOY it!

