



# 10 tips to kickstart a lifelong love of running!

Dr Ryan Worn and Oscar Owens

*"Running should be a lifelong activity. Approach it patiently and intelligently, and it will reward you for a long, long time."*  
– Michael Sargent

**The rewards of running can be just as diverse as the different types of running tracks that span the globe. For some runners, the reward comes in the form of an Olympic medal, while for others, nailing a Parkrun for the first time without stopping can be a defining moment.**

With running exploding in popularity this century, the number of people consistently pounding the pavement as a form of exercise has never been greater, and during the COVID pandemic, the world has seen even more joggers feel the burn of the run for the first time.

If you have decided to incorporate running into your life as a pursuit rather than a novelty, it likely means that you have made the distinction between running for a one-off Instagram shot to committing to running as a lifestyle activity that can bring you personal rewards and an injection of something that when done correctly might just help you live longer and healthier.

However, sticking to a run program for the first time can be challenging. We all make mistakes in our approach, particularly as newbies, but the beauty of tackling something for the first time is that we can learn from the mistakes others have made before us on their journeys.

**1 Get the "all clear" to begin**  
Starting a run program for the first time is exciting and, in many ways, the polar opposite to waiting in a GP's waiting room for an appointment. Before beginning any run program, however, getting a tick from the boss to begin your training (particularly if you are new to running or are coming back from an injury), is as important as anything you will do.

**2 Invest in good footwear**  
In a 5km Parkrun, the average 25-minute runner strikes the ground approximately 4000-4500 times with an impact force of around 1.5-2 times bodyweight. This impact (training load) is "absorbed" by the body, and when appropriate rest is allowed, the runner gets fitter and faster. However, if you run in poorly cushioned or worn-out shoes, then the impact force which is typically reduced by the shoe instead ends up transferring up the body and may lead to foot, ankle, knee, hip or back pain. Likewise, for the runner who pronates excessively and rapidly (this is much less common than you might think), a shoe that does not control motion may place you at greater injury risk. The best advice is to get a professional fitting and try the shoe out before purchasing if you can. This is where companies like The Running Company stand apart from traditional mass retailers, as an expert allows you to try several shoes that are suitable for your unique requirements.

**3 Don't blow up the engine**  
When you purchase a brand-new car, the manufacturer recommends a 'breaking in' period, as it allows the internals of the car time to adjust to the workload we put on the car. In sports science we call this the Principle of Progressive Overload; in essence, it means don't go too hard too early and factor in regular days off and recovery weeks. Build a base slowly, and get your body used to the workload before asking it to go harder.

*Turn over for more tips...*

# Tips to help you begin your running journey

**4 Run slower than you think you should**  
Most new runners run too fast. This early ramp in intensity often leads to injuries and a lack of enjoyment. In fact, the same logic applies to elite runners too, not just beginners. In a recent study, it was found that the world record holder and Olympic champion Eliud Kipchoge only spends around 10-15% of his training week running at high intensity. Elite runners run slow most of the time so that they can run hard when they need to, as this is where the greatest fitness gains occur - so you should too.

**5 Listen to your body**  
Just like a car - if you feel something is not right, you shouldn't ignore it. Niggles and pain are something most runners carry at times but when this converts to pain and a reliance on Vitamin I (Ibuprofen) to deal with the injury, it's time to check in with an expert. Don't try and tough out the injury for the sake of increasing fitness; there are other non-impact ways to build fitness such as cycling and swimming while you take the time to rehab and strengthen the injured area.

**6 Fuel up**  
A run program with the right nutrition and hydration can be the difference between enjoying what you are doing and giving in to the battle. In general, before a run it is good to consume some complex carbohydrates within 3-4 hours of the run, perhaps consume some sports drink or sports gels if the run is longer than 60 minutes (or 30 minutes at high-intensity), and after the run, consume a meal or drink containing a mix of carbohydrates, fats, and proteins. For specific advice regarding optimising food intake for performance, weight loss or recovery, you should consult a qualified dietitian.

**7 Variety adds spice**  
Variety is perhaps one of the most overlooked aspects of sports training in general, yet variety can help avoid boredom and burnout, and can even add the training stimulus you need to break through a plateau. Variety in running might be as simple as trying a new course, running with a new group, tackling some trails, or adding bouts of high and low-intensity effort. If you are limited in where you can run, then consider popping in some headphones and diving into some playlists, podcasts, or audiobooks. If money is not a concern for you, then a new pair of shoes can be a great way of increasing variety and motivation!

**8 Link your running to a future event**  
Having a goal event in mind is a great way to add some clear direction to your running and training. As sport scientists, we often like to perform a Needs Analysis and work backward from our goal event to now and see what we need to do to improve. If you know you want to tackle a 5km race in 12 weeks and have a goal finishing time of 23 minutes, then it is good to work back from that and perform your own Needs Analysis. How close am I to achieving that goal? What are my strengths and weaknesses? What can I do to improve? etc. Working back from an eventual goal allows you to plan with a much greater degree of accuracy. Alongside the increased ability to plan, the other benefit of a goal race is simply having a deadline. For many of us in our jobs, having a deadline usually means that we will get the specific task done when it is due, and the same is true for running. If you know you have an event to prepare for,

you are more likely to do the work required and less likely to look for potential convenient excuses like poor weather, housework, and post-work fatigue. These excuses might be valid for you, but usually, most of us have time to squeeze in a quick 30-60 minutes of exercise a day.

**9 Enlist a training buddy or a run group**  
In the book *Running to the Edge*, Matthew Fitterman describes how legendary running coach Bob Larsen unlocked the potential of many athletes by creating positive and competitive training groups designed to both challenge runners to run faster and to encourage runners to reflect on their performances and think about ways in which they could improve within their group. Larsen in large parts credits this strategy to the success of his Olympic medallist athletes, and the same logic can apply to your training. The group you run with doesn't have to be fast and looking to produce Olympic athletes, but it should challenge you and motivate you to better yourself. Many studies show that group exercise can increase exercise adherence, lead to reduced perceptions of pain and effort, and can increase an individual's motivation. Interestingly, these effects seem to be much less obvious when comparing sporting specific groups to exercise classes. The takeaway message - find the group that works for you and don't be afraid to swap groups.

**10 Don't overanalyse your paces and performances**  
For sports scientists involved in data-rich individual sports, such as cycling, running, and rowing, it is common to encounter the problem "Paralysis by Analysis" with athletes. This problem is as it sounds: athletes and sometimes coaches get into the habit of overanalysing every performance to look for ways to improve but end up creating a toxic training environment. While well-intentioned, this strategy often leads to anxiety and doubt, as the athlete feels they must beat their personal records every session. This expectation is unreasonable, as daily variances in exercise performance of 3-5% are common. It is not reasonable to expect your runs to each be better than the last, especially if you are not an elite athlete, and have work and life pressures to consider. What is more important is progress over time. Instead of comparing each run, look for improvements across months and years, not individual sessions. Consistency of training will take you much further than one-off good performances. It is also important to sometimes leave all your technology at home and just run by feel. You'll probably find yourself enjoying the run more, and you might even learn something new about yourself.

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