

Getting Started – A Beginner’s Guide to Running

I frequently hear from people that they are afraid or intimidated to join a running club because “they aren’t as fast as the other runners”, or they don’t feel they are ready to participate in a real practice. It concerns me because beginners are the future of the sport itself and you are much better off joining a group of experienced runners and coaches than going it alone or getting well intentioned but misguided advice from runners who really aren’t educated enough themselves. Just to be clear (and I think I speak for all of the running clubs in Florida) WE LOVE BEGINNERS!! We want to encourage you and support you in your efforts to become a better runner. We welcome you as part of the running family and are excited for you to discover all of the benefits running has to offer.

With this concern in mind this article is dedicated to all of the beginner and novice runners out there who are this very minute considering entering a distance race this fall or winter. I have put together some basic guidelines below that you can follow to get you started...I recommend joining a running club for the support and FUN element but you could get started on your own as well.

EQUIPMENT: As far as sports go, running is probably the most economical and practical choice you could make. The only major investment is a good pair of running shoes, which range from \$60 to \$120 depending on your individual needs and tastes. I recommend visiting a specialty running store for your first pair to make sure you are purchasing a shoe that will meet needs such as pronation, supination, wide widths, shock absorbency, etc. You will also want to add comfortable and efficient running attire to your list. Florida’s warm climate requires light, efficient material to keep the moisture off of your skin such as “Dry Fit”. Try to avoid cotton T-Shirts if at all possible. If you think you may be doing some running at night, add a reflective vest or battery operated “blinker belt” to your list.

THE FIRST STEP: O.K., you have your shoes and your outfit, so now what? Running is truly one of the most natural movements you will ever ask your body to perform. As a child you probably dashed around from here to there without giving it a second thought. That is actually the secret to running...don’t think about it, just do it! Walk out of your front door, step onto the road or trail, and put one foot in front of the other. It may feel a little awkward at first, but that will pass within a few days of consistent jogging. Although good form and efficient breathing is important, these aspects are relative to the individual. Pump your arms in a relaxed manner, (think “wrist to chest, elbows back”), try to run from heel to toe (those of you with a little bit of natural speed may run on your toes more), and envision running in a hallway, just barely wider than your body width (this may help to keep you from swinging your arms out instead of forward). Also for your breathing, the most efficient method is inhaling (through your nose and mouth) for two strides and exhaling for two strides. It may take a little while to get to that point, but that is normal because everyone has their own patterns and present level of fitness.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE: Now that you have the basics down, let’s talk about how to keep you running harder and faster. I believe the best way for a beginner to add distance (gain endurance) in a running routine is to make realistic goals and to use a

jog/walk technique. For example, the first week, set a goal to run for 15-20 minutes every other day. This may equal 1 to 2 miles depending on the individual. During this 15-20 minute session, start by jogging for 1 minute and then briskly walk for 1 minute. Repeat this process until you have reached your goal time. Once that becomes relatively comfortable try to jog for 2:00 and walk for 1:00. After you can accomplish this consistently increase the run time to 3:00 and the walk break remains 1:00. At the end of the third or fourth week try to run the whole session for 20 minutes. During Week 4, increase your goal time per day by 5 to 10 minutes and add your walking breaks back into the program. Continue this process weekly until you can comfortably run 30 to 40 minutes at a time.

MAKING IT INTERESTING: To improve your stride frequency (running speed); there are two techniques I recommend. The first is what is known as a Fartlek. This method involves putting surges into the middle of your run for periods of time. An example would be the following: easy jog for 10 minutes, then 5 X 2 minute surges (not sprinting, just running hard). Jog easy for 2 minutes between the surges. The other method is to do "Striders". Striders are just barely slower than a sprint and allow you to concentrate on your running form. They should be 80 to 100 meters in length with a good minute of rest in between. Six to eight Striders, two times a week should be plenty.

"STICK WITH IT" TIPS:

- **Be Conservative in the Beginning Regarding Both Intensity & Volume of Runs**
- **Keep a Log (Benefits include accountability, motivation, goal-setting)**
- **Imagine / Visualize Your Future (Break goals into short-term and long-term and celebrate the small victories along the way!)**
-
- **Set Appointments to Run With a Friend or a Group**
- **Every Now and Then Run a Different or Scenic Route to Keep You From Getting Bored**

Well, that's it! There really isn't much to it and running is one of the best activities you could choose to treat your body and mind better. Please write me at sfuhi@aol.com with any specific questions I could be of help in answering. You can do it...see you out there!

-Sonja Friend-Uhl

www.runfastpromotions.com

ACSM, USATF Certified Fitness Instructor & Coach

7 Time U.S. World Team Member (3K – Half-Marathon)