**How Do I Run a Faster 5K?**

By [Jay Johnson](http://search.active.com/search?f=articles&v=List&l=everywhere&k=Jay+Johnson) • For Active.com

Running a faster 5K is possible once you identify the key elements that need attention. But, the 5K shouldn't be viewed as a race for beginners or for middle-distance aficionados. Half marathoners and marathoners should focus on their 5K PR a couple of times a year. To be a well-rounded runner, athletes shouldn't train to run at only half marathon or marathon pace, yet for so many runners this is the case.

If you want to improve your PRs at distances longer than 5K, you should take your 5K PR seriously, as virtually all runners who improve their 5Ks see improvements in the longer distances.

**Your 5K PR Plan**

Metabolically, the 5K is over 90 percent aerobic. While this isn't quite as high of a percentage as the marathon, with is 99 percent aerobic, you need to make sure that developing your aerobic metabolism is at the forefront of your 5K training. So don't skimp on the long run, don't stop doing your threshold runs, and don't stop doing your fartlek runs. All of those workouts will help you improve your aerobic fitness, which is the basis for a faster 5K time.

***More:***[*What Are Threshold and Tempo Runs?*](http://www.active.com/running/Articles/What-Are-Threshold-and-Tempo-Runs)

The next step: Take your most recent 5K time—a time from a certified course, preferably a course that is flat (rather than a challenging hilly course)—and use that as a baseline. You then want to make a very conservative goal of 10 to 15 seconds faster than that time.

Let's say you can run a 5K in 18:45. That's six minutes per mile, or 90 seconds per 400 meters. We'll call that your "date pace," a term that legendary coach Bill Bowerman used. Then we want to come up with a "goal pace." It's important to know what per-mile pace your goal pace is. We will shoot for one second per 400m faster than your date pace. So for the 18:45 runner who currently can run 90-second 400s, we will use 89 seconds per 400m as his goal pace. If you ran 89-second pace for 400m, that is 5:56 per-mile pace, and that would give you a 5K time of 18:33, which is a nice little PR.

***More:***[*How to Train for a PR*](http://www.active.com/running/Articles/How-to-Train-for-a-PR)

I know that's a lot of math, but it's important to know your date pace, and work with a new goal pace. Goal pace is what you're shooting for when you complete your race-pace workouts. These runs are simply workouts where you run at race pace. Some people love race-pace workouts, and some people hate them.

Race-pace workouts for 5K are different than race-pace workouts for the marathon. For a marathon, you might do a 20-mile run where you try to run at race pace for the second half of the run. But when you're training for a 5K, the workout is much shorter and faster, which makes sense as the 5K race distance is shorter and you hope to run it faster.

***More:***[*Beat the Competition at Your Next Race With Fartlek Workouts*](http://www.active.com/running/Articles/Beat-the-Competition-at-Your-Next-Race-With-Fartlek-Workouts)Complete most of your 5K race-pace workouts on the track when your goal is to run a 5K PR. Why? The precision you get on a track is much better than using your GPS and running on a path or road. Remember, you're trying to run just 4 to 5 seconds per mile faster to get your goal PR, and you don't want to take the chance that your GSP is off by five seconds per mile.

For people who dislike the track: There is a mental aspect to running on a track that I think is important—akin to eating your vegetables. Even if you don't like something, it doesn't mean that it's not good for you. Well-rounded runners use the track to reach their potentials because it allows them to be precise with their pacing (in addition to being in a controlled environment, where you don't have to worry about traffic, bicycles, etc.)

***More:***[*Your Guide to Track Workouts*](http://www.active.com/running/Articles/Your-Guide-to-the-Track)

You'll want to run these track workouts in the shoes that you plan on racing in—this is the time to break in new racing shoes, as you don't want to run a race in brand new shoes.

**Examples of 5K Race-Pace Workouts**

A very simple 5K workout is 10 x 500m with a 100m float. The workout adds up to to 5K (5,000m) and it teaches your neuromuscular system what goal pace feels like. You want to groove the pace in this workout, not running the 500s any faster than goal pace. It takes a little bit of math to figure out what your pace should be for the 500, so you can just run the 400m at goal pace and continue to the 500-meter mark, making sure not to decelerate. The float part of this workout is the key. When you first do this workout, you run the 500m at goal pace, then you float at a pace that is faster than a jog, yet still allows you to recover, and then you go into the next 500m repeat.

When you do this workout two or three weeks later, you shouldn't run any faster on the 500s since you're trying to groove at that goal pace, but you can make the workout more challenging by pushing the pace on the float portions. Basically, you're running the same goal pace but with less rest, which is a great stimulus. This gives you a workout that is 5,900m of solid running, and it prepares you to run a solid 5K.

***More:***[*How Do I Get Faster for My Next Race?*](http://www.active.com/running/Articles/Running-Makeover-How-Do-I-Get-Faster-for-My-Next-Race)

**Other solid 5K workouts:**

* 12 x 400m with 30 to 60 seconds recovery, depending on your fitness
* 5 x 1,000m with a short 600m recovery jog because you get a longer workout (just over 4.5 miles)

Again, you don't need to speed up the pace of the 1,000s as your fitness improves, but you can increase your pace on the 600m recovery portion giving you a nice, long, challenging workout.

***More:***[*3 Plans for a Faster 5K*](http://www.active.com/running/Articles/3-Plans-for-a-Faster-5K)

**Should You Run Faster Than 5K Goal Pace?**

Finally, if you want to improve your leg speed, you need to do some work that is faster than 5K goal pace. At a minimum this means strides that are faster than 5K pace. I assign strides to my athletes the day before workouts so that the neuromuscular system is challenged just a bit, making the race-pace work the next day feel comfortable.

***More:***[*4 Fast Tweaks to Run Like the Elites*](http://www.active.com/running/Articles/4-Fast-Tweaks-to-Run-Like-the-Elites)

You could do 4 x 30 seconds at faster than 5K pace with 60 to 90 seconds of slow jogging in between near the end of your easy day run. You don't need to do these on the track. The flip side is you can go to the track and run some 200s with a 200m steady jog at a pace that is a few seconds faster than goal race pace. Just five 200s the day before a 5K workout will help you feel good the next day, and will ensure that in the last 200m of the 5K race, you'll be able to kick.

If you want to run a faster 5K, keep developing your aerobic metabolism, do some race-pace work and make sure that several times a week you're doing strides faster than 5K pace.

***More:***[*5 Reasons Your 5K Wasn't as Fast as You Hoped*](http://www.active.com/running/Articles/5-Reasons-Your-5K-Wasnt-as-Fast-as-You-Hoped.htm)

You stuck to your 5K workout schedule like a deer tick on a border collie and thought you'd run faster than ever. But on race day, you came away disappointed. What gives? Could be any of these classic 5K training trip-ups, says coach and athlete Elizabeth Waterstraat, founder of [Multisport Mastery](http://www.multisportmastery.blogspot.com/).

**Training Too Hard, Too Close to the Race**

"It's pretty normal for people to get scared and feel like they have to put in a final session at race pace and race distance during race week," Waterstraat says. Too hard and long of an effort too close to the race tears you down rather than help you store energy that you’ll use during the race. "What you really want to do is reduce the volume during race week and use your workouts to sharpen your legs."

***More:***[*How to Peak at the Right Time*](http://www.active.com/running/Articles/Improve-Your-Run-Training-How-to-Peak-at-the-Right-Time)

**Racing Too Much**

After your race, you need to allow your body to recover before it can perform again. "The rule of thumb is a day of recovery for every mile you race," she says. "If you're racing every weekend, you get stuck in a cycle of race/recover, race/recover, and you can't build fitness in between races. You're always a little fatigued." Not the way to PR. Instead, space your 5Ks every four to six weeks apart (some people can get away with doing them three to five weeks apart).

***More:***[*How to Recover After a 5K*](http://www.active.com/running/Articles/How-to-Recover-After-a-5K)

**Starting Speed Work Too Early in the Season**

"Speed work is fun and it makes you [get] fast quickly," Waterstraat says. "But you only need to do about six weeks of it to get the benefits." Do it too early in the spring and you're going to peak in early summer. "If your races aren't until later, too much speed work too early can leave you burned out or even injured by race day."

***More:***[*An Introduction to 5K Speed Workouts*](http://www.active.com/running/Articles/An-Introduction-to-5K-Speed-Workouts)

**Choosing the Wrong Course**

Hilly courses with many turns aren't conducive to a PR. Neither are those on dirt trails or, for most people, races where the temperature is super-hot. "If you want to set a PR, look at the race results from previous years and see how people did. You'll get a good idea of which courses are long, short, slow and fast," she says.

***More:***[*9 Fast and Flat 5Ks*](http://www.active.com/running/Articles/Flat-and-Fast-5K-events)

**Letting Life Get in the Way**

"Stress is the killer for everyone. It takes away your energy for everything. It interferes with your digestion, your sleep and all of the other factors that contribute to arriving at a race ready to do your best," she says. While you can't control every factor in the days leading up to a race, you may be in control of more than you think (for instance, not planning a big race for the morning after you return from an overseas vacation). For reasons that go beyond your race, aim to control what you can and accept what you can't.

**How to Pick the Right Running Shoes**

One of the most important things to keep in mind when beginning any exercise regime is how shoes influence your performance. Not having the correct shoe can not only lead to blisters or calluses, but also more serious injuries like back or hip pain.

Running shoes are perhaps the most important shoes you will ever buy. They must be comfortable, roomy, but most importantly, cushioned enough to absorb the constant pounding a runner's feet must endure. However, before selecting a shoe, you must find out your [running style](http://www.runnersworld.com/article/0,7120,s6-240-319-327-7727-0,00.html).

**Running Styles**

Not all runners have the same running style. It is important that a person's body weight is evenly distributed when the foot comes in contact with the ground to avoid injury. [Pronation](http://walking.about.com/od/shoechoice/g/pronation.htm) is the slight rolling in of the feet (about fifteen percent) when the outside part of the heel makes contact with the ground. If the force of impact is properly distributed and your body weight is supported. This is essential for proper shock absorption, however, this is not always the case.

Runners who [overpronate](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pODcT55_7zA&feature=related) are also called flat-footed. These people tend to roll their foot inward ***more*** than the ideal fifteen percent. Shock is not absorbed sufficiently because the foot and ankle fail to stabilize the body. The person's arch's collapses upon weight bearing and the big toe and the second toe must do all the work. Overpronation can lead to [shin splints](http://www.active.com/running/Articles/Shin-Splints-101--Treatment-and-Prevention-Tips.htm) and knee pain.

[Underpronation](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJQvW7JVqYY), also called [supination](http://www.thestretchinghandbook.com/archives/pronation-supination.php) is when a runner tends to roll the foot inward at ***less*** than the ideal fifteen percent. This results in an uneven distribution of the shock impact where the force is concentrated on the outside of the foot. Back pain and knee pain can be a common problem in runners who tend to overpronate.

**Best Running Shoes for Overpronators**

In general, runners who overpronate need a shoe with [motion-control](http://www.motioncontrolrunningshoes.info/) and a medial post to offer shock absorption. Look for the words "stabilization" and "support" or "motion-control" in the descriptions. [These](http://www.livestrong.com/article/68631-running-shoes-overpronation/) are the best type of running shoes for overpronators.

**Best Running Shoes for Underpronators**

Running shoes for underpronators need to have a flexible and extra-cushioned midsole and a medial section to help with pronation. In addition, they should be light-weight and have a moderate arch. [These](http://www.runningshoeswizard.com/best-shoe-for-underpronate.html) are the best type of shoes for underpronators.