

FITNESS ON THE RUN

By Mindy Solkin



Quick! Name a sport where you don't have to be an elite athlete, yet you can perform the activity right alongside of them? A sport where there aren't any referees, judges, teammates or balls to alter your performance? If you answered "running", you're right. And the list keeps going. Why run you might ask? The following are some key benefits.

- *Running is the most efficient path to cardiovascular fitness. 30 minutes a day, three to four days a week will yield an excellent level of fitness in the shortest possible time.*
- *Running is inexpensive and simple to learn. You need the proper shoes and clothing to participate, and not much else.*
- *Running is the most accessible of aerobic sports. No matter where you live or travel, an area to run is usually right outside your door.*
- *Running is a flexible method of training. You can run at your own pace, with or without company, at whatever time of day suits you.*
- *Running makes you feel good. Fitness, self-esteem and stress reduction all increase with a good training program.*
- *Running is an excellent component of any weight control program. Few activities burn calories more quickly.*
- *Running is for families and individuals of all ages. There are running programs for kids and seniors, as well as events for families. There are non-competitive races you can enter, which offer a great feeling of camaraderie.*

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GETTING STARTED

With all of this to offer, it's no wonder that millions of people run for fitness. Like any endeavor that's worth doing well, one must first start with the desire to accomplish the task. Once you have the desire, it's then most important that you educate yourself, so as not to get started on the wrong foot. (No pun intended!) If you haven't been exercising regularly, plan on getting a complete physical first. This way you'll rule out any pre-existing conditions. If you're considerably overweight or pregnant, it is suggested to start off with a walking program before you embark on running.

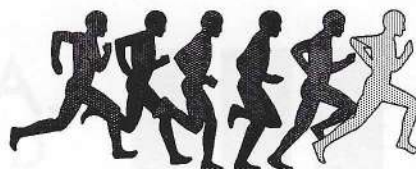
As mentioned above, you'll need proper shoes and clothing. Running and sports specialty stores have knowledgeable salespeople who can assist you with your gear. A good running shoe should have good cushioning and stability and should fit comfortably. You should have a thumb's width of space between your longest toe and the shoe, when standing. Technological advances in the apparel business have made running clothes more comfortable and quicker drying than ever thought possible. Fitness apparel companies such as *Body Wrappers*, offer a walk/run line that features Supplex®, a quick drying fabric and CoolMax®, a fabric with the ability to wick moisture away from your body and release it into the air. For women, a CoolMax-lined, Supplex bra is necessary for proper support. In colder weather, layering is the key. Always start your run feeling a little bit chilly because as you run your body will heat up. Then you can take layers off as necessary. Also, keep your head and hands covered and wear CoolMax or acrylic socks since cotton doesn't dry.

While you're at it, it's also a good idea to purchase a stop watch. This will be used in order to follow your training program to keep track of time. A regular watch can be used too, but it cannot perform the proper functions and is not as accurate.

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Safety Checks

Since running is done mostly outside, it is important to adhere to some hard and fast rules concerning safety.

- *Headphones should never be worn, especially by women, since you can't hear cars, dogs or people. Tune into your surroundings, not out. Save the headphones for your indoor workout on the treadmill.*

- *Always carry identification (including medic alert ID if applicable) and tell someone of your whereabouts.*

- *If running in the street, run on the left hand side of the road so you'll face the oncoming traffic. This way you can make eye contact with the driver.*

- *Wear reflective clothing if you're going to run at night. It's important to allow motorists to see you.*

- *There's safety in numbers, so find a partner or a group to run with. A local running club is a good place to start and you'll meet people with common interests too.*

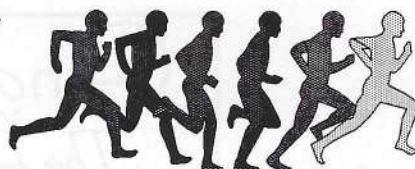
Training Techniques

So you've got your gear, a clean bill of health, and some safety guidelines. Now it's time to head out the door. The basic elements of a running program include warm-up, stretching, the run, and cool-down. Because stretching should always be done when your muscles are warm, it's important to warm-up first by walking briskly until you begin to sweat or feel warmer. This will take approximately two to five minutes depending on the weather and how fit you are. Once you are warmed-up, you can do some gentle stretching of the major muscle groups involved in running which include the calves, Achilles tendon (back of lower calf), hamstring (back of thigh), and quadricep (front of thigh). Remember not to bounce and to hold the stretch for 15 seconds. Stretching before you run helps prevent injuries

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by increasing blood flow to the working muscles. During your run these muscles contract. Therefore you must also stretch after you run, so that you don't run the risk of pulling the muscle later.

A runner comes down three times their body weight. Hence, it is important to run on surfaces which will absorb more shock. A track, boardwalk, or asphalt road are all good surfaces. Stay away from cement sidewalks. The best choice is the track since it is a measured area. One lap around is 1/4 of a mile. After you have warmed-up and stretched, start your run by walking at a brisk pace for ten minutes. Then run for two minutes and another brisk walk for ten minutes. Finish with a two minute cool-down of easy walking. Cooling down allows you to slowly bring your heart rate back to normal. Do this workout three times each week for the first two weeks. Then follow the training schedule in the chart.

In the beginning don't worry about the pace (speed) of your runs. Run at whatever pace feels comfortable. A good way to tell is to take the "talk test." You should be able to talk without gasping for air. If you're out of breath, then you're pushing too hard. Slow down. Eventually, as you progress, your speed will pick up too. Just let it happen naturally.

After you have been running for a few months, set a goal to enter a race. Your aim should be just to finish. The 5K race (3.1 miles) is a distance that you'll be able to complete. On any given weekend you will find races held across the country. Your local running club can assist you with finding one that's suitable for you.

Running is a sport that gives you measurable results. Anyone who runs regularly will tell you that there's no better feeling for both mind and body. Because when you cross the finish line, you're a winner!

Mindy Solkin is a competitive runner and USA Track & Field certified running coach. She is the creator of RunnerRobics™, a unique running program which teaches the Art and Science of Running to runners of all abilities from one mile to the marathon. Mindy is also a certified personal trainer and the Marketing Director for Body Wrappers, a fitness apparel company. She can be reached at (212) 279-3492.

Mindy Solkin's 12 Week Training Schedule

WEEK	BRISK		BRISK		TOTAL WALK	TOTAL RUN	TOTAL TIME
	WALK	RUN	WALK	RUN			
1	10	2	10	-	20	2	22
2	10	2	10	-	20	2	22
3	8	4	8	2	16	6	22
4	8	4	8	4	16	8	24
5	6	6	6	6	12	12	24
7	4	10	4	10	8	20	28
8	4	15	4	5	8	20	28
9	3	18	3	5	6	23	29
10	2	20	2	5	5	25	29
11	-	25	-	-	-	25	25
12	-	30	-	-	-	30	30

* Remember to always warm up and cool down with 2-3 minutes of easy walking

* All numbers indicate minutes.



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