

# READY. SET. RACE!

Running is the new “it” family activity—and whether you want to try a 5K or an obstacle-course event, we’ve got everything you need to know and do to happily cross the finish line together.

BY SHAUN DREISBACH

Color Run finishers celebrate with a massive huddle in Seattle.



**A FEW WEEKENDS AGO, MY FAMILY WAS OUT DOING ERRANDS WHEN A COLOR RUN DASHED BY US**—hundreds of kids and grown-ups racing through the streets, covered head-to-toe in different shades of colored powder (you get doused every kilometer of the 5K). “OMG, Mom, that looks so fun!” my 10-year-old daughter squealed. “We have to do one of those.” I should start by saying that I am not a runner—and, to be honest, I’ve never aspired to be one. I exercise all the time but don’t find the plod-plod-plod of jogging to be the spiritual, endorphin-pumping experience that my running friends do. And while my kids have their sports, they’re not runners either. But seeing those families race by—laughing, cheering each other on, and just having a total blast—even I had to admit it looked pretty awesome. Before I knew it, we were researching races and lacing up our new sneakers.

I discovered something too: You actually don’t need to be an experienced runner to try out a 5K—or any kind of family-friendly race, for that matter. And there are more of them than ever these days. In just a five-year span, races like the one that inspired us have seen participation rates shoot up by 4 million people. Why? Because it’s an incredibly rewarding experience that all fitness levels—and even all ages—can

get into. If your kiddos can walk, experts say, they can race. “Parents ask me how old their child should be before doing something like this, and the fact is, there’s no data available to guide the decision. The more important criteria is to make sure the child has fun doing it and enjoys the training,” says Cynthia LaBella, M.D., who chairs the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Sports Medicine & Fitness. “For most kids, the health and wellness benefits far outweigh the risks for injury.”

And, she says, since these races tend to be more about fun than competition, even little ones who may not have the stamina to jog the entire time can get in on the action. “I did a 5K fundraiser race with my daughter when she was 5. It was totally hilarious!” says Anita Lavine, a mom of two from Seattle. “She barely ran at all. There was a lot of skipping and walking—and I ran some of it with her riding piggyback. But it was an amazing experience, and afterward she had such a sense of pride that she’d done it and been involved in this special event.”

Inspired to get your own family on the road? We’ve worked out all the details: You’ll find a simple week-by-week training plan to help you prepare, intel on feeding and watering your kids, and everything else you need to get your race on. I’ve gotta dash too! My family is outside warming up right now!

## Ready to Run

For most families, four to six weeks is all you’ll need to train, so sign up for that race and use the date as motivation to get moving, says Ewunike Akpan, a certified personal trainer with the American Council on Exercise and a Master Build Our Kids’ Success trainer who specializes in getting both kids and adults into shape—and making it feel like play, not work. (You’ll see!) The plan she developed for us—which you’ll find in the chart on the next page—uses interval training to gradually increase your running stamina, and also includes strength exercises to balance out all that cardio. There’s also info on how to prevent injury and make training days fun. Let’s do this!

## FIND YOUR PERFECT RACE

Surf on over to these sites to locate runs in your area—5Ks, obstacle courses, and everything in between. It’s worth doing a little Googling too; many states have their own running clubs that can also help.

1. [RunningintheUSA.com](http://RunningintheUSA.com)
2. [Thecolorrun.com](http://Thecolorrun.com)
3. [Toughmudder.com](http://Toughmudder.com)
4. [Spartan.com](http://Spartan.com)
5. [USAtriathlon.org](http://USAtriathlon.org)
6. [Kidstri.com](http://Kidstri.com)

FROM LEFT: PORTLAND PRESS-HERALD/GETTY IMAGES; ANDREW WILSON/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO.



## Your Family 5K Training Plan

Start by going on a test run, and let your kids be the guide. Once someone starts breathing hard enough that you can hear it, have them slow down and walk to recover, then start again once they catch their breath. If everyone can run for at least five minutes straight, you can skip right to Week 3. Otherwise, start at Week 1.

	WEEKS 1 & 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6
<b>PLAN TO</b>	Run/walk twice a week for the next two weeks for <b>30 minutes</b> each time.	Run/walk twice this week for <b>30 minutes</b> each time, followed by <b>25 minutes</b> of strength training.	Run/walk twice for <b>35 minutes</b> each time, followed by <b>20 minutes</b> of strength training.	Run/walk twice this week for <b>45 minutes</b> each time, followed by <b>15 minutes</b> of strength training.	Run twice this week for <b>50 minutes</b> each time, followed by <b>10 minutes</b> of strength training.
<b>WARM UP</b>	Always warm up for <b>5-7 minutes</b> before beginning each training session. Walk for a few minutes, then do some fun moves to warm up your muscles. A few ideas: Walk, hiking your knees up toward your chest; do squats; march like a soldier, keeping your arms and legs straight and lifting them alternately; skip, kid-style; do butt kicks; bunny-hop, taking small jumps forward with your feet together.				
<b>RUNNING INTERVALS</b>	Alternate walking and jogging at a slow pace. Jog for <b>2-3 minutes</b> , then walk for <b>1 minute</b> to recover. Repeat for <b>30 minutes</b> .	Alternate walking and running intervals at a slow pace. Run for <b>5 minutes</b> , then walk for <b>2 minutes</b> to recover. Repeat for <b>30 minutes</b> .	Alternate walking and running at a moderate pace. Run for <b>10 minutes</b> , then walk for <b>2 minutes</b> to recover. Repeat these intervals for <b>35 minutes</b> .	Alternate walking and running at a moderate pace. Run for <b>15-20 minutes</b> , then walk for <b>2 minutes</b> to recover. Repeat until <b>45 minutes</b> are up.	You should be able to run the whole length of a 5K, but if it ever seems like too much, slow down and walk until you're ready to get back to it.
<b>STRENGTH TRAINING</b>	Skip this until Week 3!	<b>3 planks</b> , holding for 30 seconds each; <b>3 side planks</b> ; <b>10 supermans</b> ; <b>10 hip bridges</b> ; <b>5 forward crab walks</b> and <b>5 back</b> ; <b>5 inchworms</b> ; <b>10 push-ups</b> ; <b>5 crab toe touches</b>	Same as Week 3—but try to do all the moves in 5 fewer minutes!	Repeat the first four exercises from Week 3, then add: <b>10 squat jumps</b> ; <b>10 side leg raises</b> ; <b>10 bench step-ups</b> ; <b>20 calf raises</b>	<b>10 burpees</b> ; <b>10 planks with arm row</b> per side; <b>3-5 cartwheels</b> ; <b>handstand against a wall</b> , holding for as long as you can!
<b>COOL DOWN</b>	Cool down at the end of every session with some walking to lower your heart rate, followed by stretches—which will prevent soreness. Hold each stretch for <b>30-60 seconds</b> . Some moves Akpan likes: Fold forward and reach for your toes; stretch your quads by grabbing your ankle and gently pulling your foot toward your butt; loosen up your hamstrings by placing your heel on a bench and reaching for your toes (keeping leg straight); stretch your chest: place one hand on a tree or doorframe at shoulder height and slowly turn your body away from it until you feel a stretch in your chest and shoulder.				

### STRENGTH-TRAINING GLOSSARY

**Bench step-ups** Step right foot, then left, up onto a low bench, then step down. Switch your starting side with each set.

**Burpees** From standing, squat down, place your hands on the ground, and jump your feet back into a plank position. Lower body to the floor for a push-up. Push back up to plank. Hop feet back in and stand up.

**Calf raises** From standing, lift up onto your tiptoes and hold, then lower.

**Cartwheels** A blast! If anyone can't pull them off, just try to approximate the move.

**Crab walks** Sit with your knees bent and feet flat on the ground; place palms on the ground behind you. Lift hips a few inches and walk forward on your hands and feet like a crab, then walk backward.

**Crab toe touches** From your crab position, lift left leg and right arm and try to touch your toes. Lower and repeat on the other side.

**Handstands against a wall** Make it a game and see who can hold it the longest.

**Hip bridges** Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the ground; rest arms by sides. Press feet firmly down as you slowly lift your hips off the ground; hold for a few counts, then lower.

**Inchworms** Bend forward at the hips and place hands on the ground with knees slightly bent, then walk them forward until you're in a plank position. Now walk feet in to meet your hands and stand back up.

**Planks** Lie on the ground on your belly, chest lifted off ground. Flex your feet (toes on the floor), engage legs, and lift body up, balancing on forearms and toes. Keep entire body strong and butt in line with shoulders and heels. Hold.

**Push-ups** Get into position and bend elbows and lower chest toward the ground, then push back up.

**Side leg raises** Lie on one side, with your feet and hips stacked; prop yourself up on your forearm. Align shoulder over elbow. Lift your top leg straight up, keeping foot parallel with the ground and flexing your toes; pause at top, then lower.

**Side planks** Lie on one side and prop yourself up on your forearm. Stack your feet and hips. Lift hips straight off the ground. Hold. Repeat on the opposite side.

**Squat jumps** Stand with your feet hip-width apart, bend your knees, and squat your butt back and down, then jump straight up in the air, and land back down in the squat with knees bent.

**Straight-arm planks with arm row** Get into a push-up position, with feet slightly wider than hip-width. Hold it while you bend right elbow and lift it straight up, bringing hand up by side. Lower hand and repeat on the other side.

**Supermans** Lie facedown, with your arms and legs extended. Slowly lift your arms and legs off the ground as high as you can; keep the neck relaxed and look down at the ground. Hold, then lower.



## Tips for Success

These pro pointers will help you make it to race day without any hiccups.

### GO EASY AT FIRST.

"If you or your kids aren't already runners, it's important to start slowly in order to help prevent injuries," says Dr. LaBella. She recommends beginning with a walk/jog program (like ours!) and adding no more than about 10 percent to your time or intensity each week. "Some kids may get very enthusiastic about training," says Dr. LaBella. "So you might have to hold them back a bit to make sure they don't overdo it."

### LISTEN TO YOUR BODY.

It's important not to get too hung up on your training plan. If you need to slow down your pace, or recover for an extra minute—or even jog for a little less time, that's okay.

### INVEST IN GOOD SHOES.

Don't just order any old thing online—actually go to a store that specializes in running. The staffers are

trained to fit everyone's unique feet and stride, and recommend the shoe that will work best. So worth it to keep everyone's feet happy and pain-free! Check the fit every few months, too, says Dr. LaBella: "Kids' feet are constantly growing, and their shoes need to be replaced more frequently than parents realize," she adds.

### SCHEDULE IT.

Plan to run together two days a week, and mark those dates on the calendar—it will help you stick with your training. Akpan also recommends cross-training one day a week. It can be any activity other than running—swimming, playing soccer, whatever your family likes to do. "Mixing up activities will help you prepare for the race by building endurance, challenging your bodies in a different way, and keeping you injury-free," she says.

### KEEP HYDRATED.

Most kids don't need a special diet when training for a race—your regular, healthy fare will do just fine. But do keep an eye on hydration: "Kids often forget to drink water during the day—even if they're exercising. And that can lead to poor performance, migraines, and a bad mood," says Stephen R. Daniels, M.D., chair of the AAP committee on nutrition. So make sure to water them well not just before, during, and after your runs—but also remind them to sip regularly throughout the day too.

### PUMP UP THE FUN.

While training, there are bound to be times when everyone feels a little less motivated. When it just feels hard, Akpan recommends making a family playlist that you can all listen to while you run, and treating your kids to a small reward after each workout, like a fruit pop, movie, or toy.