

how to train for a 5k

How to Train for a 5K: A Complete Guide to Getting Race-Ready

how to train for a 5k is a question that many beginners and even some experienced runners ask themselves before signing up for that first race. Whether you're aiming to finish your first 5K or shave a few minutes off your personal best, proper preparation is key to enjoying the race and achieving your goals. Training for a 5K isn't just about running every day—it involves building endurance, improving speed, and incorporating recovery strategies to help your body adapt and perform at its best.

If you're wondering where to start, what kind of workouts to include, or how to stay motivated throughout your training journey, this guide will walk you through everything you need to know to prepare effectively for a 5K race.

Understanding the Basics of 5K Training

Before diving into specific workouts or training plans, it's important to have a clear understanding of what a 5K race entails. A 5K is 3.1 miles long, which makes it one of the most accessible race distances for runners of all levels. Because it's relatively short, the training focuses on building a good balance between speed and endurance.

Why Training Matters for a 5K

Some might think that since 5K is a short race, you can just show up and run. While that's true to an extent, training properly can drastically improve your experience and results. Training helps:

- Build cardiovascular endurance so you can maintain a steady pace
- Strengthen muscles to reduce injury risk
- Improve your running economy and speed
- Teach your body how to handle race-day stress and pacing

Setting Realistic Goals

How you train will depend largely on what your goal is. Are you running your first 5K just to finish? Or are you aiming for a specific time? Setting realistic, achievable goals based on your current fitness level helps tailor your training plan and keeps you motivated.

Creating a Structured 5K Training Plan

One of the best ways to approach how to train for a 5k is by following a structured plan that gradually increases your mileage and intensity. Most beginner plans last between 6 to 8 weeks, while intermediate runners might train for 8 to 12 weeks.

Key Components of a Training Plan

A well-rounded 5K training plan typically includes these essential elements:

- **Easy runs:** These are slower-paced runs that help build endurance without overtaxing your body.
- **Speed work:** Intervals or tempo runs designed to increase your running speed and improve your anaerobic threshold.
- **Long runs:** Slightly longer runs that build aerobic capacity and mental stamina.
- **Rest days:** Crucial for recovery and injury prevention.
- **Cross-training:** Activities like cycling, swimming, or yoga that complement running and improve overall fitness.

Sample Beginner 5K Training Week

Here's what a typical week might look like for someone new to running:

1. **Monday:** Rest or light cross-training
2. **Tuesday:** Easy run (20-30 minutes)
3. **Wednesday:** Speed intervals (e.g., 4 x 400 meters at fast pace with recovery jogs)
4. **Thursday:** Rest or yoga/stretching
5. **Friday:** Easy run or cross-training
6. **Saturday:** Long run (start with 3 miles or 30-40 minutes)
7. **Sunday:** Rest

Incorporating Speed and Endurance Training

Since 5K races require both speed and stamina, it's important to balance your training between the two.

How to Build Endurance

Endurance is the foundation of your 5K training. Focus on running at a comfortable, conversational pace to increase your aerobic capacity. Gradually increase your weekly mileage by about 10% each week to avoid injury. Long runs don't have to be much longer than 3 to 4 miles but should be done at an easy pace.

Adding Speed Workouts

Speed workouts like intervals, fartlek runs, and tempo runs help improve your race pace by teaching your body to sustain faster speeds.

- **Intervals:** Short bursts of fast running followed by recovery jogs (e.g., 6 x 400 meters).
- **Tempo runs:** Sustained efforts at a comfortably hard pace, usually 20-30 minutes.
- **Fartlek:** A "speed play" session where you vary your pace throughout the run based on how you feel.

Try to include one speed session per week once you have a base level of fitness.

Nutrition and Hydration Tips for 5K Training

What you eat and drink plays a vital role in your training success. Proper nutrition fuels your runs and helps your body recover faster.

Fueling Your Runs

Eating a balanced diet rich in whole grains, lean proteins, healthy fats, and plenty of fruits and vegetables supports your energy needs. For shorter runs, a light snack like a banana or toast with peanut butter about 30-60 minutes before running can help prevent fatigue.

Hydration Strategies

Staying hydrated is essential, especially if you're running in warm weather. Drink water throughout the day, and consider electrolyte drinks if you're sweating heavily or running longer than an hour.

Preventing Injuries During Your 5K Training

Injury prevention is often overlooked but is critical when learning how to train for a 5k. Common running injuries include shin splints, runner's knee, and plantar fasciitis.

Tips to Stay Injury-Free

- **Warm up and cool down:** Spend 5-10 minutes before and after runs stretching and doing dynamic movements.
- **Listen to your body:** Don't push through sharp pain or persistent discomfort.
- **Wear proper running shoes:** Get fitted at a specialty running store to find shoes that match your gait and foot shape.
- **Include strength training:** Exercises targeting your core, hips, and legs can improve running form and reduce injury risk.
- **Rest and recovery:** Make sure to take rest days seriously to allow your muscles to repair.

Staying Motivated Throughout Your Training

Training for a 5K can sometimes feel challenging, especially when juggling work, family, or other commitments. Staying motivated is key to crossing that finish line with a smile.

Tips to Keep Going

- **Set mini goals:** Celebrate small milestones like running continuously for 10 minutes or completing your first speed workout.
- **Find a running buddy or group:** Training with others can make runs more

enjoyable and hold you accountable.

- **Mix up your routes and workouts:** Variety keeps things fresh and reduces boredom.
- **Track your progress:** Use a running app or journal to see how far you've come.
- **Reward yourself:** Treat yourself to new gear or a massage when you hit training targets.

Every runner's journey is unique, and learning how to train for a 5k is as much about listening to your body and enjoying the process as it is about following a strict schedule. With consistent effort, patience, and a bit of planning, you'll be ready to tackle your next 5K with confidence and maybe even set a personal record.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the best beginner training plan for a 5K?

A good beginner training plan for a 5K typically spans 6 to 8 weeks, starting with a mix of walking and running intervals, gradually increasing running time while decreasing walking breaks, and incorporating rest days to allow recovery.

How many days per week should I train for a 5K?

Training 3 to 4 days per week is effective for most beginners, allowing time for rest and recovery while building endurance and speed.

What types of workouts should I include in my 5K training?

Incorporate a mix of easy runs, interval training (speed work), tempo runs, and long runs to build endurance, speed, and aerobic capacity for your 5K.

How important is cross-training when preparing for a 5K?

Cross-training, such as cycling, swimming, or strength training, is important to improve overall fitness, reduce injury risk, and enhance running performance without overloading running muscles.

How can I avoid injury while training for a 5K?

To avoid injury, gradually increase your mileage and intensity, wear proper running shoes, warm up before runs, cool down after, and listen to your body to rest if you feel pain.

Should I do strength training as part of my 5K training plan?

Yes, strength training helps improve muscle endurance, running efficiency, and injury prevention. Focus on core, glutes, legs, and stability exercises.

How do I improve my 5K race time?

To improve your 5K time, incorporate speed workouts like intervals, tempo runs, maintain consistent training, focus on proper running form, and ensure adequate rest and nutrition.

Additional Resources

How to Train for a 5K: A Comprehensive Guide to Building Speed and Endurance

how to train for a 5k is a question that resonates with runners of all levels, from beginners aiming to complete their first race to seasoned athletes targeting a personal best. The 5K, or 3.1-mile run, is one of the most popular race distances worldwide due to its accessibility and the challenge it presents. Training effectively for a 5K requires a strategic balance of endurance, speed work, recovery, and nutrition. This article explores the critical elements of 5K training, integrating expert insights and evidence-based practices to help runners optimize their preparation.

Understanding the 5K Race Demands

Before diving into training specifics, it is essential to grasp what the 5K race entails physiologically. Unlike longer races such as the half-marathon or marathon, the 5K demands a higher proportion of anaerobic capacity and speed endurance. This means the body must efficiently manage both aerobic energy systems and lactic acid buildup. Research indicates that 5K runners typically operate at 85-95% of their maximum heart rate during the race, underscoring the need for targeted training that improves both cardiovascular fitness and muscular stamina.

Why Focused 5K Training Matters

Training for a 5K is not merely about running longer distances but also about improving running economy and pace consistency. Many novice runners mistake the event for a casual jog, which can result in poor race-day performance and increased injury risk. On the other hand, overzealous training without adequate recovery can lead to burnout. Thus, understanding how to train for a 5k effectively means implementing a plan that progressively enhances speed, endurance, and mental toughness.

Key Components of 5K Training Programs

Successful 5K training programs integrate several components, each targeting different physiological adaptations. Below are the primary elements to consider:

1. Base Mileage and Endurance Building

Building a solid aerobic base is fundamental. Even though a 5K is a relatively short distance, endurance training improves the body's ability to sustain a faster pace over the entire race. For beginners, this might involve running three to four times a week, gradually increasing weekly mileage by about 10% to avoid overuse injuries. According to a study published in the *Journal of Sports Science & Medicine*, gradual mileage increments help improve cardiovascular efficiency without excessive fatigue.

2. Speed Work and Interval Training

One defining feature of 5K training is incorporating interval workouts that enhance speed and VO2 max—the maximum amount of oxygen the body can utilize during intense exercise. Typical interval sessions include repetitions of 400 meters to 1 kilometer at a pace faster than race pace with recovery jogs in between. This type of training conditions the muscles to handle lactic acid accumulation, allowing runners to maintain a higher speed for longer periods.

3. Tempo Runs

Tempo runs are sustained efforts at a “comfortably hard” pace, usually around 80-90% of maximum heart rate. These runs improve lactate threshold, a critical factor in 5K performance. For example, a 20-minute tempo run at race pace or slightly slower teaches the body to clear lactic acid more efficiently. Such workouts also develop mental resilience by simulating the discomfort experienced during a race.

4. Recovery and Rest Days

Rest and recovery are often overlooked but are vital for preventing injuries and enabling physiological adaptations. Adequate sleep, proper hydration, and active recovery days (e.g., light jogging or cross-training) help muscles repair and grow stronger. Overtraining can lead to fatigue, decreased performance, and higher injury rates, so balancing training load with rest is crucial.

5. Strength Training and Cross-Training

Incorporating strength training, particularly core and lower body exercises, enhances running economy and reduces injury risk. Exercises like squats, lunges, and planks contribute to better stability and power. Additionally, cross-training activities such as cycling or swimming can improve cardiovascular fitness without the repetitive impact of running, offering a complementary training stimulus.

Sample 8-Week 5K Training Plan

To provide practical guidance on how to train for a 5k, here is an example of a progressive 8-week plan suitable for beginner to intermediate runners:

1. **Weeks 1-2:** Focus on building base mileage with easy runs of 20-30 minutes, three times per week. Include one day of brisk walking or cross-training.
2. **Weeks 3-4:** Introduce interval training once a week (e.g., 4 x 400m at faster than race pace with 2-minute jog recovery). Maintain easy runs on other days.
3. **Weeks 5-6:** Add tempo runs lasting 15-20 minutes at threshold pace once a week. Increase long run duration by 5-10 minutes to boost endurance.
4. **Weeks 7-8:** Sharpen speed with intervals of longer distances (e.g., 3 x 800m) and taper mileage to allow recovery before race day.

This structure ensures gradual progression, mixing intensity with recovery to optimize performance gains.

Nutrition and Hydration Strategies for 5K Training

While training volume and intensity are critical, nutrition and hydration underpin effective recovery and energy availability. Carbohydrates serve as the primary fuel source for high-intensity efforts like 5K runs. Endurance athletes should aim to consume 5-7 grams of carbohydrates per kilogram of body weight daily during training phases. Protein intake supports muscle repair, with recommendations typically around 1.2-1.7 grams per kilogram.

Hydration status influences cardiovascular function and thermoregulation. Even mild dehydration can impair performance, so maintaining adequate fluid intake before, during, and after runs is essential. Sports nutritionists also emphasize the timing of meals and snacks to maximize glycogen stores and optimize race-day energy.

Common Mistakes to Avoid When Training for a 5K

Despite its popularity, many runners encounter pitfalls when learning how to train for a 5k. Recognizing these errors can help runners stay on track:

- **Neglecting Warm-ups and Cool-downs:** Skipping these increases injury risk and delays recovery.
- **Ignoring Pacing:** Starting too fast in training or races can lead to premature fatigue.
- **Overemphasizing Speed Work:** Excessive interval training without base endurance weakens overall performance.
- **Insufficient Rest:** Failure to incorporate rest days can cause overtraining syndrome.
- **Poor Footwear Selection:** Wearing inappropriate shoes may lead to biomechanical issues and injuries.

Tracking Progress and Adjusting Training

Monitoring training data such as distance, pace, heart rate, and perceived exertion can offer valuable feedback. Many runners use GPS watches or smartphone apps to collect this information. By analyzing trends, one can identify plateaus or signs of overtraining and adjust the plan accordingly. Additionally, setting intermediate goals and participating in tune-up races can provide motivation and valuable race experience.

Ultimately, how to train for a 5k effectively combines scientific principles with individualized adjustments. By integrating endurance building, speed sessions, adequate recovery, and supportive nutrition, runners can approach race day with confidence and a well-developed fitness base. Whether aiming to finish comfortably or chase a personal record, a structured training approach lays the foundation for success in the 5K distance.

[How To Train For A 5k](#)

how to train for a 5k: The Ultimate Running Guide J. M. Parker, 2012-08-09 So you wanna run? OK, then let's run. But it's not going to be easy and this no nonsense program is not for the faint of heart. If you want to run with us, you can't be a punk! Running a marathon is not for the weak bodied or for the fragile spirited. The physical part of running is only a small portion of how far you can go. It's your mind that will carry you past the physical obstacles. You will feel pain during your training, but it's just weakness leaving the body. Don't cry. Just push through it and stop whining! If you want to earn that 26.2 bumper sticker, this book will help you get it, but don't think

you won't be pushed out of your comfort zone. Comfort is the thief of progress. We don't want to rob you of your progress, so we'll make sure you are anything but comfortable. You may be in pain and you may be tired, but if you stick with it, you'll be glad you did. There's nothing quite like knowing you've accomplished a feat that makes you part of an elite group. It's not every day someone runs 26.2 miles. Written by a 12 year Army veteran who trained soldiers to get fit, you won't find any sissy stuff here. We concentrate on diet, choosing the proper clothing, training, and most important: mental discipline. So, if you're truly ready, grab your sneakers, your water bottle and this book to get started. Stay motivated, and stay disciplined. It's all worth it when you cross that finish line. Besides, no one likes a quitter.

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how to train for a 5k: *Start Running! A 5k Training Schedule for Beginners* Tony Yang, 2012-05-30 You can run a 5K. All you need is 30 minutes three to four times a week. Really. You've taken the first step, by reading this book. Perhaps you've already signed up for a 5K, and don't have the faintest idea what that entails. Perhaps you're setting a personal or professional goal, or you need to get fit for health reasons. Or perhaps, like many, you're sick of being out of breath, tired, and generally feeling uninspired. Much of running is mental, and as long as you keep putting one foot in front of the other, you will succeed in running a 5K.

how to train for a 5k: *Fast 5K* Pete Magill, 2019-09-10 Spend two hours with Pete Magill's Fast 5K and you'll know how to run your fastest 5K. In his fast-paced, ultimate guide to 5K running races, celebrated running coach Pete Magill reveals the 25 crucial keys to setting your next 5K PR. Magill shares hard-earned lessons he gained while leading 19 teams to USA national championships and setting multiple American and world age-group and masters records. Fast 5K shares Magill's essential keys to finding your fastest running fitness and race readiness. The 25 keys include optimal training mileage, effective tempo runs, VO2 max workouts, hill repeats, plyometrics that work, ways to prevent injuries, recovery tips, guides to diet and racing weight, choosing racing flats, and much more. Offering three 12-week and one 16-week 5K training plans, Fast 5K is the key to your best 5K running times. Pete Magill is a world-class 5K runner, personally holds multiple American and world age-group records in track & field and road racing and is a 5-time USA Masters Cross Country Runner of the Year. Now in this distilled guide, you can get world-class advice on how to run your fastest 5K ever.

how to train for a 5k: 5k Training for Beginners Jago Holmes, 2013 If you've ever fancied running a 5k or just getting fit enough to run 5 kilometers in one go (that's 3.1 miles to you and me!) and you want to do it in the shortest amount of time, without risking injury, boredom or stagnation, then this book is exactly the one for you. '5k Training For Beginners - From Couch to 5k Runner In 8 Weeks Or Less,' contains everything you need to know about running a 5k in the fastest, most efficient and fun way. The book comes in 2 parts so if you're in to reading all about why and how your body changes then start by reading part 1. Part 2 deals with the physical side of running and jogging and features 4 fantastic simple to follow running programs for beginners of all shapes, sizes and fitness levels. You'll have access to some of the most up to date, cutting edge techniques to help improve your running. THE PROGRAMS AND TECHNIQUES IN THIS BOOK WORK, plain and simple. They've been honed and refined over 12 years having been road tested by a myriad of clients from all types of backgrounds and fitness levels. You won't be bored following this unique, time saving 5k training program AND you won't need to start running endless miles each week in order to see results. If you could get the same benefits by doing a shorter more enjoyable and invigorating run as opposed to a long, arduous and grueling one, which one would you choose? Hopefully you chose the first option, because this is what the whole concept behind '5k Training for Beginners' is all about. Here are 4 reasons why you should choose this running book... You'll be able to successfully and comfortably run a 5k at the end of your training; you'll have accomplished something that most people only think about doing. This program will help you lose weight quickly, build muscle and tone your body. By committing to something like this, the chances are as a side effect, you'll get in to the best shape of your life! You'll radically improve your health. Keep up with your training and you'll

have more energy, be thinner, happier and live longer, you'll just feel great most of the time. Supercharge your energy levels on demand. You'll know exactly how to create your own 'feel good factor' which you can turn on and off like a tap. This program has been designed for beginners and that's the way it's intended, but if you're an experienced runner you'll learn a few things to help you to get better, faster and reduce the amount of time you need to spend running and jogging. No grueling or tedious long distance running needed AND no special equipment required. Here are some more of the secrets you'll learn inside: How the biggest mistake that most new runners make is to set off at the beginning of their run, like a dog out of the traps... way too fast. Meaning within a short distance they need to stop because they're too tired and breathless to carry on. This is one of the worst ways of getting better at running because you'll need to rest after only a short amount of time. You'll discover how using advanced running techniques throughout your 5k training will transform your fitness and stamina levels... in just days never mind weeks. As well as this, these great strategies will actually reduce the overall time you need to spend on your training! It's designed for anyone who wants to start running but hasn't got hours to spare each week to do so. This truly is THE only running book you'll ever need.

how to train for a 5k: 5K and 10K Training Brian Clarke, 2008-11-14 Make your workouts count with the breakthrough system that synchronizes your energy levels with your training effort. Instead of fighting your body to finish a workout just because it's written on the calendar, choose the most effective workout from 5K and 10K Training based on your body's capacity to perform at any given time. Effort-based training maximizes training adaptation by matching the goal of each workout with its optimal training level: hard when energy is high and recovery is adequate, and easy when energy is low and you're under physical stress. Effort-based training also gives you the most control over the training process, allowing you to stay injury free while actually increasing the energy you have available for workouts. Sample programs contain a variety of schedules and detailed workouts for developing five race-specific abilities. Run stronger and faster with more energy by using the proven system in 5K and 10K Training. With customizable programs to choose from and accompanying training logs you can use to record and evaluate your progress, this unique system is the fastest way to reach your training goals.

how to train for a 5k: 5K Training Kristin Kara, 2012-02-10 Running is a coordinated and complex move that includes the whole body. Especially, running a long distance race like 5k requires stamina and strength to endure the distance. Proper training program clubbed with the vigor and determination to win would take the runner a long way in his or her pursuit. In this guide, you will learn the following:- Keeping fit tips for 5k running- Breathing Techniques for 5k Running- Preparation and Practice Tips- Stability and Endurance Training- Speed Training Tips - Nutrition Tips for a 5k Run- Training Your Mind- Training Schedule / Program

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how to train for a 5k: Running Sampson Sharpe, 2014-08-27 Who Else Wants To Run A 5k Race? ***LIMITED TIME OFFER 50% OFF (Regular Price \$5.99)*** Learn how to get back into shape in 12 weeks Do you want to run a 5K race but think you just can't do it? Well, think again. You can do it With this book you can learn how to run a 5K in only twelve short weeks. It may seem like a long time, but it'll fly by when you start to actually train. This book will even teach you how to avoid injury and soreness. You'll even learn how to avoid frustration while training when using this book, and getting someone to train with you is, of course, always a help. Don't forget to plug in your headphones for a little motivation music Week by week you'll find what to do from Sunday to Saturday. You'll have a plan for each day of the week, while still having a day off. Through the recommended tips you'll find this process to be even easy. So take the plunge, and learn how to run a 5K in as little as 12 weeks. The only thing holding you back is you. Your key is inside this book, waiting for you to grab it and open the doorway to success. 7 Reasons to Buy This Book 1.This book will teach you how to get back into shape with a few simple techniques and tips. 2.Learn how to avoid injury in this book by using the proper relaxation techniques, stretches, and footwear. 3.Inside this book you'll learn how much a buddy can help you when it comes to running and the motivation to do so. 4.You'll learn how to feel comfortable enough to go from training in your home to training in the gym in no time with this book. 5.Inside this book you'll learn how to start your endurance training and build up your stamina for a 5K race in twelve weeks. 6.Learn how to use your diet to your advantage in giving you fuel for your workouts and keeping in you in shape inside this book. 7.This book will teach you how to go from the couch to a 5K safely in twelve weeks. What You'll Learn from Running Yes. It's Possible Week 1: Exercise Daily with Tips & Techniques Week 2: Add in Some Endurance Training Week 3: Focus on the Cardio Week 4: Start Increasing Your Distance Week 5: All About Your Timing Week 6: Power Up & Add in the Gym Week 7: Focus on Your Stamina Week 8: Add in More Nutrition to Go Further Week 9: Find a Racing Buddy Week 10: Strengthen Your Muscles for the Race Week 11: Mixing It Up a Little Week 12: Take It Slower but Keep In Shape Now That You're Ready Want to Know More? Hurry For a limited time you can download Running - The Beginners Guide: From The Couch To A 5k In 12 Weeks for a special discounted price of only \$2.99 Download Your Copy Right Now Just Scroll to the top of the page and select the Buy Button. ----- TAGS: running, running technique, running for beginners, jogging, running & jogging, Sprinting, marathon running

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marathoner who qualified for the Olympic Trials—valuable coaching on gearing up for and finishing a marathon. Bloch explains the benefits of cross-training for marathon runners, offers winning strategies specific to individual race courses, and more.

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how to train for a 5k: Running from Scratch Barrett Williams, ChatGPT, 2025-01-02 Embark on your running journey with Running from Scratch, the ultimate guide for beginners eager to transform their fitness dreams into reality. Whether you're starting from zero or needing a motivational boost, this comprehensive eBook is your trusty companion on the path to completing your first 5K, and beyond. Dive into Chapter 1 and unravel the basics of running, while shattering common myths that often hold beginners back. Discover why a 5K is the perfect goal for newcomers and how setting the right foundation can propel you further than you imagined. Harness the power of mindset and motivation in Chapter 2. Learn to set realistic goals, uncover your personal why, and maintain a positive attitude that fuels long-term success. Before you hit the ground running, Chapter 3 ensures you're equipped with the right gear, from shoes to trackers. Then, build a solid base by walking before running in Chapter 4, setting the stage for your fitness evolution. Unlock the secrets of structured progression with the 8-Week Training Plan in Chapter 5, guiding you from groundwork to speed and stamina. Ensure your form and technique are spot-on in Chapter 6 to run efficiently and safely. Injury prevention, recovery, and proper nutrition are paramount. Chapters 7 and 8 provide essential strategies and tips to keep you healthy, hydrated, and fueled for success. Safety first! Chapter 9 covers all you need to know about running in various conditions, while Chapter 10 fortifies your mind with strategies for race day. Celebrate the triumph of crossing the finish line in Chapter 12 and reflect on your journey in Chapter 13, with insights to set new goals. Engage with fellow runners in Chapter 14 and explore advanced techniques in Chapter 15. Running from Scratch is more than just a guide—it's your entry into the vibrant world of running, setting the pace for a lifelong adventure. Ready, set, transform!

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bombarded with 'expert' opinion on how to run faster and often spend more and more money on trying to do so. **Running 5K and 10K: A Training Guide** is an accessible, jargon-free guide for all distance runners committed to improving their times. It doesn't offer any quick and easy answers; just tried-and-tested practical advice on how to train more effectively and shave a few seconds - or even minutes - off your personal best. Aimed at all levels of runner, from the complete beginner through to more experienced wanting to improve their times, and illustrated with 32 colour photographs and 16 diagrams.

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