

Training Tips

Here are some tips to jump-start your own program.

Wear the Right Shoes

It is important that kids have a good pair of athletic shoes. They don't need to be expensive, but they should fit properly and feel comfortable. If you can, keep running shoes just for running. If kids wear them all day, they will wear out quicker and feet will feel more tired.

Pace Yourself

Kids should keep a steady pace while running. If they start out too quickly, they will end up tiring near the end of the run. It is better to keep a steady pace from beginning to end. A good rule of thumb -- a steady pace is one where you can talk to your friend or family member while running without being short of breath.

Walk If You Get Tired

All runners use walking breaks at times. For kids just starting out, alternate running and walking 100 steps one week, then next week try 100 running and 50 walking steps. Kids should use a walking break if they are breathing hard or if the start to feel aches and pains. When rested, start running again.

Eat Right

What and when kids eat before exercise can make a big difference. Don't let them eat something five or ten minutes before exercise, as their bodies will focus more on digestion rather than exercise. A banana or peanut butter and jelly sandwich are good options 30 to 45 minutes before a run. Avoid foods that are sugary or high in fat as they do not provide long-term energy. Instead, offer an apple, granola bar, dried fruit, pretzels or a handful of nuts.

Keep Kids Motivated

Remember, the most important element in fitness is to keep moving. Running may not come easily to everyone, but it can be fun and rewarding. Introduce running through attainable steps. Instead of focusing on “running the whole way,” mix running with walking and look for progress in the increased time spent “on the run.” Incorporate other fun physical activities to help keep kids motivated. Also, get kids engaged in their own success by letting them record their mileage/minutes/steps.

Find New Places to Run

You can run just about anywhere, as long as it’s safe for kids. Take a break from your sidewalk and make a special running trip. You can visit the local school’s running track and time your laps. Or check out the many trails offered in state, county and regional parks, at the beach or in the woods. Runners can always be found around one of the lakes in the Twin Cities: Lake Phalen or Como Lake in St. Paul; Lake Calhoun, Lake Harriet or Lake of the Isles in Minneapolis. And regional trails such as the Gateway Trail (St. Paul to Stillwater) or the Luce Line Trail (Wayzata to Winstead) make for a all-day family outing.

Running in the Heat

- Stay hydrated, make sure you drink water before and after running.
- Plan to drink every 20 minutes. That means if your run is longer than 20 minutes you should plan to run past a drinking fountain or carry water with you.
- Try running in the early morning or late evening when it is not as hot and remember to run slower on very hot days.
- Wear a cap or hat to shade your eyes and keep your head cooler.
- Use good judgment. If heat is extreme, consider an air conditioned workout.

Running in the Cold

- Wear a hat or stocking cap and gloves/mittens. You lose most of your body heat through your head and hands.
- Start out slowly and give your muscles time to warm up. It's easier to hurt or pull a muscle in the cold if you start out too quickly.
- You warm up very quickly when you exercise, even when it's cold. Wearing too much can be as uncomfortable as wearing too little.
- On cold and windy days, add a windbreaker instead of a sweatshirt or fleece top. Keeping the wind out will keep you from feeling as chilly. Start out running "into" the wind and return with a the wind at your back. Not only will this keep your body temperature more comfortable, its fun to have the wind "help" you finish your run!
- Use good judgment. If cold is extreme, consider an indoor workout.