

# Q&A

I'm a new runner – I need guidance on where to begin

**Q** When starting out running, is it best to go quicker over a shorter distance, or slower over a longer one?  
*Cheryl Haggerty*

**A** **DISTANCE** Running can be a bit of a shock to the system if you have not run much before, so as a beginner runner I would advise against aiming for long distances. The longer the distance, the more impact your body is absorbing and the more tiring it is! I recommend that you start off with shorter distances and work your way up over a period of time to avoid injury.

The ideal length of your first run will depend on your fitness status and experience. For example, if you have run a little before, or if you are already aerobically fit, you will manage a longer run than someone who has no previous experience with exercise.

If you have no previous experience, try mixing running and walking in varying intervals. For example, you could alternate 30-second runs with 60-second walks, and so on, adjusting the intervals to your current fitness. Gradually reduce the walking intervals and you will reach the stage where you can run continuously.

If you do have previous experience, you can try going for a steady-state run where you maintain the same effort level over a set period of time. However, regardless of your experience, I suggest that you try no more than 20 minutes to begin with.

## SPEED

As for speed, finding the right pace will be trial and error. It's better to start off too slowly than too fast, so begin at a pace that feels relatively easy and run within your comfort zone for the first few runs. You will need to build an aerobic

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base before working on running as fast as you can, so just focus on running for extended periods initially.

When you have reached the point where you can comfortably run for a period of time, such as 20-30 minutes, you can focus on upping your effort levels and dropping your pace a little. You could experiment with faster bursts of running; try upping the pace a little for a minute every few minutes, and then dropping it back down again throughout the run. This will give you a feel for how much faster you might be able to go on a continuous run.

Alternatively, you could try extending your running time by 5-10 minutes. Only lengthen one or two of your weekly runs at maximum, and wait 2-3 weeks before increasing the length of them again.

Whatever you decide to do, keep some of your runs at an easy pace and some shorter, simply to allow your body to adapt and recover between efforts.



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