Training on a treadmill provides a controlled environment for hitting goal paces.

BY ASHLEY MATEO

Conquer a Fast 5K With This Treadmill Plan

WINTER GENERALLY ISN'T considered racing season—not that you can't find great races to beat the winter blues! But this off-season is still the ideal time to: A. build your aerobic base, and B. work on your speed. And you don't need a track (or even to venture outside) to train to run faster. The treadmill can be a runner's best friend when it comes to tapping into your pace potential, especially for a 5K.

"Training for 5Ks generally includes speed and tempo runs, and the treadmill allows you to precisely set the paces, inclines, and interval lengths you want to run at," says Lindsey Clayton, a certified run coach, cofounder of Brave Body Project, and senior master instructor at Barry's in New York City. That way, you're not wasting mental energy constantly looking at your running watch.

What to know about pacing

If you've ever taken a treadmill class, you've probably heard an instructor tell you to run at your race pace, whether that's mile, 5K, 10K, half-marathon, or even marathon pace. You don't actually need to have raced those distances to know how fast to go; those reference points are just an easy way to cue multiple people to run at their own specific speeds.

If you're really not sure where to start, use your rate of perceived exertion (RPE). In that case, you'd use a scale of 1 to 10 to judge your effort level, says Clayton. A jog is an RPE of 3 or 4, and an all-out effort is a 9 or 10. From there, you can figure out what effort level corresponds to a specific treadmill speed for you.

Trevor Raab

How this 5K plan works

Clayton designed this four-week 5K training plan to help you develop speed and power for a PR.

The first week, you'll do a mile time trial to gauge where you are in terms of speed, says Clayton. "This data will help you create goals that are realistic with your current level of fitness," she says. "After a 5- to 10-minute easy jogging warmup, your first timed mile should be at an effort level of 8 out of 10. Start off at 5K pace and gradually increase after you hit a half mile. After you finish and recover, reassess if you could have pushed harder at the beginning or if you pushed too hard. Try to progress your speed in your second timed mile, even if it's just a second or two faster!"

Once you've established a mile baseline, the weekly programming is straightforward: Mondays are for interval training. You'll run fast for short periods of time, then recover and repeat. Getting used to running really fast for a short distance will translate to running faster at longer distances.

Thursdays are for tempo runs and/or threshold pace work to help you maintain a "comfortably hard" pace for 20 to 25 minutes, says Clayton. Holding onto a sustained speed—a little slower than 5K pace—helps you build muscle fibers that lead to gains in speed and endurance. You'll finish these workouts with sprints, which are the treadmill version of strides. You'll do these sprints at mile pace or faster, aiming for 85 to 95 percent of your max effort, Clayton says, adding that you should focus on form during them.

You can incorporate two to three easy running days into your weekly schedule, plus a long run. Even though a 5K is one of the shorter races you can sign up for, running longer than that distance in training helps develop your aerobic system—and "the 5K is still a primarily aerobic activity," says Clayton. Time on your feet at a conversational pace trains the body to become more efficient.

On easy-run days, beginners should aim for 20 to 30 minutes; intermediate runners, 30 to 40 minutes; and more advanced athletes, about 40 to 50 minutes. For long runs, beginners should aim for about 30 to 40 minutes; intermediate, about 45 to 60 minutes; and advanced, 60 to 75 minutes. Increase the length of your long run by at least five minutes for week two, and another five minutes for week three.

For this plan, aim to strength train on Tuesdays, focusing on your core and lower body, and on Thursdays, focusing on your core and upper body. Sundays are rest days, but you can also do an easy (very light!) jog for active recovery.

TRAINING SCHEDULE CHART

	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
MONDAY	• ½-mile warmup, 2 x 1-mile time-trial progression, 2–3 min rest after each mile, ½-mile cooldown	• ½-mile warmup, 4 x ½-mile repeat progression at 5K pace (each effort gets 0.2–0.5 faster), 1–2 min recovery between efforts; end with 5 x 30-sec sprints, 45-sec recovery between	• ½-mile warmup, 10 x ¼-mile repeat progression (5 efforts at 5K pace, 5 efforts at mile pace), 90–120 sec recovery between; end with 5 x 30-sec sprints, 45-sec recovery between	• ½-mile warmup, 2 x 1-mile time-trial progression, 2–3 min rest after each mile; end with 5 x 30-sec sprint, 60-sec recovery between
TUESDAY	• Strength train	• Strength train	• Strength train	• Strength train
WEDNESDAY	• Easy run	• Easy run	• Easy run	• Easy run
THURSDAY	• ½-mile warmup, 20 min at 10K pace (incline: 0%, 2%, 0%, 3%, 0%, 2%, 0%, 3% every min), 2–3 min recovery; end with 4 x 30-sec sprints, 45-sec recovery between; strength train	• ½-mile warmup, 20-min tempo progression, start at 10K pace (increase speed by 0.2 every 3–4 min), 2–3 min recovery; end with 4 x 60-sec sprint, 60-sec recovery between; strength train	• ½-mile warmup, 1 mile at half-marathon pace, 1–2 min recovery, 1 mile at 10K pace, 1–2 min recovery, 1 mile at 5K pace; strength train	• ½-mile warmup, 5 min at 10K pace, 5 min at 5K pace, 5 min at 10K pace, 5 min at 5K pace, 2.5 min at mile pace, 3–4 min recovery walk/jog; strength train
FRIDAY	• Rest day	• Rest day	• Rest day	• Rest day (or easy run)
SATURDAY	• Long run	• Long run	• Long run	• Rest day (or easy run)
SUNDAY	• Rest day	• Rest day	• Rest day	• RACE DAY!

PACE CHART

Need a starting point for your target speed on the treadmill? Try these ranges. If it feels too fast or too slow for the effort you're aiming for, adjust as needed.

JOG	5.0–7.0 MPH
HALF MARATHON	6.0–8.0 MPH
10K	7.0–9.0 MPH
5K	8.0–11.0 MPH
SPRINT	9.0–12.0 MPH