How to Prepare for a 5K

Get Your Z’s!
Pre-race jitters tend to strike the night before the race, interrupting your sleep. Prepare yourself instead by getting quality sleep two nights before the race and taking that day completely off from any activity.

Keep It Light
During race week, your running mileage should decrease. At this point, your training is really about “storing up” rest so your legs are ready on race day. During the week, include two to three short runs with a few, small pick ups to keep your legs fresh. Two days out from the race, take a day off for total rest.

Fill the Tank
On race morning, be sure to eat the breakfast you’ve practiced in training. Aim to eat about 2 hours prior to the race. Keep it simple — eat something high energy and easily digestible. Be sure to include hydration — water, sports drink, and coffee if that’s part of your normal routine.

Get There Early
There’s a lot to be done on race morning including parking, packet pick-up, waiting in line for the restroom, warming up. Arrive at the race site 60 minutes prior to the start—knowing where you can park, what time packet pick-up closes and where to go for the starting line.

Warm It Up
About 25 minutes prior to the race, get warmed up. Start with a 10 minute easy jog, then slowly build your pace for 5 minutes. Then, include up to five short pick ups under 30 seconds at race pace. Gently stretch any tight muscles after your warm up.

Get in Line
The starting line can be crowded and nerve-wracking with so many people and different paces. Starting in the middle to back of the pack is safe for most beginners. You will start with those around your pace and you will have many more ahead of you to chase down.

Breathe
On race day, let go of any comparisons to other runners and release any worries or doubts. You’ve done the training and if you have the desire to get to the finish line, you will arrive. At the starting line, take a few deep breaths and assure yourself that you have what it takes to cover 3.1 miles. Revisit your best training sessions to find the confidence you need.

Pace Yourself
Most racers give their best effort in the first mile leaving two more to go! Aim to negative split your effort on race day—that means finishing the second half of the race faster than the first half. Start conservatively and build your effort throughout the run. In the last quarter mile, kick it in to the finish line to finish strong.

Keep It Positive
When things get tough, it’s common for the little voice in your head to start telling you all the reasons why you will fail or why you should slow down. Often, having a positive mantra for the race—such as “I can do it” or “Fast feet to the finish line”—will distract you from any pain and keep you focussed. Practice these affirmations during your harder training sessions so they become automatic on race day.

Capitalize on the Motivation
The post-race feeling can be exhilarating. Capitalize on it to keep your momentum going and set new goals for the next finish line. Sign up for another run race a few weeks later to keep yourself motivated to continue with your new habits, to test your progress or just to have fun.