

# How Do I Run a Faster 5K?

- *By Jay Johnson | For Active.com*

Running a faster 5K is possible once you identify the key elements that need attention. But, the 5K shouldn't be viewed as a race for beginners or for middle-distance aficionados. Half marathoners and marathoners should focus on their 5K PR a couple of times a year. To be a well-rounded runner, athletes shouldn't train to run at only half marathon or marathon pace, yet for so many runners this is the case. If you want to improve your PRs at distances longer than 5K, you should take your 5K PR seriously, as virtually all runners who improve their 5Ks see improvements in the longer distances.

## Your 5K PR Plan

Metabolically, the 5K is over 90 percent aerobic. While this isn't quite as high of a percentage as the marathon, with is 99 percent aerobic, you need to make sure that developing your aerobic metabolism is at the forefront of your 5K training. So don't skip on the long run, don't stop doing your threshold runs, and don't stop doing your fartlek runs. All of those workouts will help you improve your aerobic fitness, which is the basis for a faster 5K time.

The next step: Take your most recent 5K time and use that as a baseline. You then want to make a very conservative goal of 10 to 15 seconds faster than that time.

Let's say you can run a 5K in 18:45. That's six minutes per mile, or 90 seconds per 400 meters. We'll call that your "date pace," a term that legendary coach Bill Bowerman used. Then we want to come up with a "goal pace." It's important to know what per-mile pace your goal pace is. We will shoot for one second per 400m faster than your date pace. So for the 18:45 runner who currently can run 90-second 400s, we will use 89 seconds per 400m as his goal pace. If you ran 89-second pace for 400m, that is 5:56 per-mile pace, and that would give you a 5K time of 18:33, which is a nice little PR.

I know that's a lot of math, but it's important to know your date pace, and work with a new goal pace. Goal pace is what you're shooting for when you complete your race-pace workouts. These runs are simply workouts where you run at race pace. Some people love race-pace workouts, and some people hate them.

Race-pace workouts for 5K are different than race-pace workouts for the marathon. For a marathon, you might do a 20-mile run where you try to run at race pace for the second half of the run. But when you're training for a 5K, the workout is much shorter and faster, which makes sense as the 5K race distance is shorter and you hope to run it faster.

Complete most of your 5K race-pace workouts on the track when your goal is to run a 5K PR. Why? The precision you get on a track is much better than using your GPS and running on a path or road. Remember, you're trying to run just 4 to 5 seconds per mile faster to get your goal PR, and you don't want to take the chance that your GSP is off by five seconds per mile.

For people who dislike the track: There is a mental aspect to running on a track that I think is important-akin to eating your vegetables. Even if you don't like something, it doesn't mean that it's not good for you. Well-rounded runners use the track to reach their potentials because it allows them to be precise with their pacing (in addition to being in a controlled environment, where you don't have to worry about traffic, bicycles, etc.)

You'll want to run these track workouts in the shoes that you plan on racing in-this is the time to break in new racing shoes, as you don't want to run a race in brand new shoes.

## Examples of 5K Race-Pace Workouts

A very simple 5K workout is 10 x 500m with a 100m float. The workout adds up to 5K (5,000m) and it teaches your neuromuscular system what goal pace feels like. You want to groove the pace in this workout, not running the 500s any faster than goal pace. It takes a little bit of math to figure out what your pace should be for the 500, so you can just run the 400m at goal pace and continue to the 500-meter mark, making sure not to decelerate. The float part of this workout is the key. When you first do this workout, you run the 500m at goal pace, then you float at a pace that is faster than a jog, yet still allows you to recover, and then you go into the next 500m repeat.

When you do this workout two or three weeks later, you shouldn't run any faster on the 500s since you're trying to groove at that goal pace, but you can make the workout more challenging by pushing the pace on the float portions. Basically, you're running the same goal pace but with less rest, which is a great stimulus. This gives you a workout that is 5,900m of solid running, and it prepares you to run a solid 5K.

### Other solid 5K workouts:

- 12 x 400m with 30 to 60 seconds recovery, depending on your fitness
- 5 x 1,000m with a short 600m recovery jog because you get a longer workout (just over 4.5 miles)

Again, you don't need to speed up the pace of the 1,000s as your fitness improves, but you can increase your pace on the 600m recovery portion giving you a nice, long, challenging workout.

### Should You Run Faster Than 5K Goal Pace?

Finally, if you want to improve your leg speed, you need to do some work that is faster than 5K goal pace. At a minimum this means strides that are faster than 5K pace. I assign strides to my athletes the day before workouts so that the neuromuscular system is challenged just a bit, making the race-pace work the next day feel comfortable.

You could do 4 x 30 seconds at faster than 5K pace with 60 to 90 seconds of slow jogging in between near the end of your easy day run. You don't need to do these on the track. The flip side is you can go to the track and run some 200s with a 200m steady jog at a pace that is a few seconds faster than goal race pace. Just five 200s the day before a 5K workout will help you feel good the next day, and will ensure that in the last 200m of the 5K race, you'll be able to kick.

If you want to run a faster 5K, keep developing your aerobic metabolism, do some race-pace work and make sure that several times a week you're doing strides faster than 5K pace.

## About the Author

### Jay Johnson

Coach Jay Johnson works with runners of all ages and abilities. A former collegiate coach at the University of Colorado, he's coached U.S. national champions, adult and high school runners, and is the coach for [Athletics Boulder](#), an adult running club. Sign up for individualized training from Jay at [RunnersConnect.net](#). Check out his [Running DVDs](#), read his blog at [coachjayjohnson.com](#), follow him on Twitter [@coachjayjohnson](#), or message him on [Facebook](#).

