

## Go the **distance**

*It's high time to get in shape for that 5K, 10K or marathon*

By Tony Regan

**T**he sun is beating down on your head, the sweat is flooding your eyes and your muscles are working overtime, screaming at you to give up. Fortunately, they're no match for the volume of your friends, who are yelling your name as you pass them.

As they cheer you on, you're reminded that the finish line is closer than you think. The exhilaration of being on the verge of finishing your first organized race fuels you even more than the energy gel you just squeezed into your mouth.

You worked hard for this moment and you feel like a champion. Noth-

ing is going to stop you from finishing this race.

Or you could hit the snooze button on the alarm and go back to sleep.

But if this is the year you're finally going to run that 10K with your friends from work, the 5K Turkey Trot with your kids or — OK, maybe next year — the Chicago Marathon, it's time to get to work. So roll out of bed, grab your shoes and hit the streets. And if you need motivation, fast forward your thoughts to the inevitable finish line.

“It is a great feeling. I won't run with music so I can hear the crowd. It's awesome to hear people call out your name and cheer you on,” says longtime runner Emily de Lacoste, 27.

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The Boston resident has participated in three marathons and numerous other races, including 5Ks and 10Ks. “While running is considered very much a solo sport, runner’s high is definitely a real thing, especially when even strangers cheer you on during a race.”

Whether you’re an occasional or experienced runner, you’ll likely be drawn to numerable charitable races this summer. Along with the experience of benefiting a good cause comes the power of reaching a goal, setting a new fitness regime and achieving that inevitable runner’s high.

**The starting line**

So where do you begin? Determine what you can handle. Beginning with a 5K is a great place to start, and remember that it’s fine to set a goal of running the entire race but slowing to a walk if your body can’t handle it is a good idea.

Longtime ultra runner Stephanie Violet usually runs in eight races each year. She suggests looking into running-equipment stores and running communities, which often host training groups.

“In almost any city there will be a run/specialty store and most of the time they will have information

on races,” says Violet, adding that joining a group is a great way to meet like-minded people. “You can train together with new friends, even if you don’t normally hang out with them.”

Violet says a shorter run makes sense for beginners, but don’t think that it’s a walk in the park. You’ll still need to train hard to achieve strong results. A marathon or 50K is certainly more difficult, but the race and the training are much longer.

“A general rule of thumb for the beginner is stick to the shorter runs because your body isn’t really ready for the longer races in terms of endurance,” says Violet. “Races can also be stressful. A 5K or 10K is a great introduction because they’re shorter and good indicators to know what you’re prepared for physically and mentally.”

Violet says an additional benefit is the vibe of the race itself. “There are tons of people and it’s very energetic,” she says. “And once you’ve mastered the shorter races, you can tackle the next distance.”

If you plan to keep running, your long-distance options are plentiful. They include:

- 10 mile
- Half marathon
- Marathon
- 50K
- 50 mile
- 100K or 100 mile

**Smart training**

While you may feel ready for the next level after your first few runs, use caution. Otherwise you’ll end up disappointed or even worse, injured.

Dr. Kevin Plancher of Plancher



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