

FAST

25 CRUCIAL KEYS AND 4 TRAINING PLANS

5K

PETE MAGILL

19× national championship coach
and author of *SpeedRunner*

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Introduction

A Fast 5K

So you want to run a fast 5K.

But you're not sure how to train for it—or, once trained, how to execute the perfect race.

Relax. You're not alone. Every year, between nine and ten million Americans run a 5K race. Some are happy just to finish. But others, like you, want more.

You want to run faster. Faster than you've run recently, faster than you have in your current age group, or maybe faster than ever before.

And you suspect that if you could gain access to the training and racing secrets that allow elite runners to log stellar race after stellar race, you, too, could unlock the magic of your own 5K performance.

The good news is that you're right: There are training, lifestyle, and race adjustments that will make you a better and faster 5K runner.

The bad news is that there is no magic bullet—no single adjustment that on its own will net you the performance you're after.

There's a Bateke proverb that goes like this: "The river swells with the contribution of the small streams." You'll need to create your own "river" by embracing a wide variety of key practices. That's because the 5K is a unique race that pairs the speed of a miler with the endurance of a marathoner. Only a multifaceted approach—one that targets both speed and endurance fitness—will yield your faster 5K.

Sound like a lot to put on your plate?

INTRODUCTION

Again, relax. Training for a faster 5K has more to do with variety, fun, and self-confidence than it does with pain, discipline, and sacrifice. The trick is making sure that your training and lifestyle adjustments provide the keys for unlocking your 5K potential. That's what this book is all about.

PART
ONE

TRAINING

KEYS

Set a Reasonable Goal

On the surface, this key seems simple: Set a 5K performance goal that is manageable.

Yet this is where many runners make their first mistake.

A 25-minute 5K runner sets a goal of 22 minutes. Or an 18:30 runner targets 16:45. Or another runner wants to somehow get faster in the four weeks before a local 5K.

All these runners have one thing in common: They're setting a benchmark for success that is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve within a reasonable training time frame. Often, the result will be a negative 5K race experience.

A smarter performance goal is this: Run faster for your next 5K than you did for your last one, and then continue to improve after that. At this stage, don't target an actual time; instead, be satisfied with improved fitness and whatever time improvement that fitness yields. (You can target a specific time in Key 12.)

This isn't about embracing a Zen approach to the sport. It's about recognizing two important concepts that guide successful 5K training programs:

- 1 Improvement is always incremental (and occurs at different rates for different runners), making it counterproductive to train harder than necessary to achieve incremental gains in performance.

- 2 Targeting a performance that can't be achieved at your next 5K robs you of the positive feedback you'll experience from targeting a more modest performance goal that's within reach. Don't create a negative environment in which smaller, incremental improvements are viewed as undeserving of celebration—or, worse yet, as failures.

This isn't to imply that you shouldn't have long-term performance goals—including time-specific goals. Many high school, college, and open runners target qualifying times for conference, regional, and national competitions. Masters (age 40+) runners often want to match (or beat) times they ran as younger athletes. And a specific goal time is easier to focus on than the more abstract concept of incremental improvement. It's just that your primary goal should be to institute the type of training, lifestyle, and race execution changes—represented by the keys in this book—that will build the strongest physical version of your running body and remold your mental approach to competition.

Besides, as your training takes hold and you begin to improve, you just might discover that your original long-term 5K goal—rather than being too optimistic—falls short of your true potential. You might end up running faster than you thought possible.

“It's not the will to win that matters—everyone has that. It's the will to prepare to win that matters.”

—Paul “Bear” Bryant, six-time national championship football coach at the University of Alabama

Climbing the Steps to 5K Success

COMPONENTS ► STEPS

Race	5K RACE
Sharpening	Pace work and tune-ups.
Patience	One incremental step at a time.
Consistency	Don't skip workouts. Don't sabotage recovery.
Lifestyle adjustments	Eat, sleep, and recover. Balance running and non-running activities.
Mental training	Perform each workout at the correct effort. Focus on the task at hand.
Physical training	Strengthen your heart, muscles, connective tissue, nervous system, and energy systems.

The key to successful 5K training isn't setting overly ambitious time-related race goals. It's implementing effective training, lifestyle, and race-day strategies—patiently, incrementally, one step at a time.



Schedule Hill Repeats

“Some people train knowing they’re not working as hard as other people. I can’t fathom how they think.”

—Alberto Salazar, three-time New York Marathon champion

Now that we’ve discussed the benefits of both repetitions and hills, let’s combine them to create a super-effective 5K workout: hill repeats. Hill repeats include reps that last between 30 seconds and 2 minutes, with rest intervals (jogging and walking) that are double or triple the length, in time, of the reps.

While workouts like distance and tempo runs, VO_2 max reps, and long hill runs trigger adaptations in the number and size of mitochondria in your muscle fibers (i.e., you develop bigger, more numerous mitochondria, thereby increasing aerobic energy-producing potential), intense workouts such as hill repeats turbocharge those mitochondria, significantly increasing their output of aerobic energy. If the workouts already discussed in this book are like outfitting your home with radiant LED security lights, then hill reps are the switch that turns those lights on.

Hill repeats also improve your ability to produce force quickly. That’s important because the prime directive each time your foot lands during a stride is to generate enough force to get back into the air. The quicker you do that, the quicker you start your next stride. Generating force is a two-step process. First, you accelerate your foot downward, creating force when your foot collides with the ground. Second, your muscles

generate additional force while your foot is on the ground. Because hill repeats shorten the distance your foot travels downward (lessening collision force) and require extra overall force generation to fight gravity, they improve your ability to produce muscular force on the ground. Back on level terrain, the result is a quicker cadence (i.e., more steps per minute) and increased stride length. In other words, you get faster.

Hill repeats also stimulate other training adaptations:

- ▶ They significantly strengthen all muscle-fiber types.
- ▶ They rewire your nervous system to recruit all fiber types simultaneously.
- ▶ They increase your heart's stroke volume.

You'll need to find a hill that's challenging, but not so steep that you can't maintain a good stride. You don't run hill reps by pace. Instead, you target an effort that is slightly more intense than what you'd expect to exert during a 5K race (e.g., 1500–3K effort). Your goal is to finish all reps with a little gas left in the tank—that is, you could probably run one more rep if you had to.

After each rep, turn around and head back down the hill to your start line. Walk for the first 10–15 seconds of your recovery interval, and then jog the rest of the way down. If you reach your start line with time remaining in your recovery interval, do a short walk. For longer recovery intervals, it's okay to stand for 15–30 seconds at the start line after your short walk.

Remember not to turn your hill repeats into a distance run. You need a full recovery, so avoid jogging continuously from the end of one rep until the start of the next. Walk, jog, walk, stand, recover.

KEY 9 SCHEDULE HILL REPEATS

Workout Progression for Hill Repeats				
Workout	Number of reps	Length of reps	Recovery interval	Recovery type
1	8–12	30 sec.	1–1.5 min.	Jog/walk
2	10–15	30 sec.	1–1.5 min.	Jog/walk
3	8–12	45 sec.	1.5–2 min.	Jog/walk
4	6–8	60 sec.	2–3 min.	Jog/walk/stand
5	4–6	90 sec.	4–5 min.	Jog/walk/stand

This is a typical progression of hill repeat workouts. Do no more than one session per week. It's OK to skip weeks between sessions.

Hill repeats require intense effort, so one session during a training week is plenty, and no more than two to three sessions per month. The Workout Progression for Hill Repeats table maps out a typical progression of hill-repeat workouts. This progression works even if you skip a week or two between hill rep sessions.

About the Author

Pete Magill is the lead author of the book *Build Your Running Body*, author of *The Born Again Runner* and *SpeedRunner*, a former senior writer and columnist for *Running Times* magazine, and a current columnist for *PodiumRunner* magazine. As a 5K runner, Magill has the fastest-ever American times for age groups 45–49 (14:34.27 on the track), 50–54 (15:02 on the road), and 55–59 (15:42.13 on the track). He’s a five-time USA Masters Cross Country Runner of the Year, the fastest-ever 50-plus American for 10K (31:11), and a 2016 inductee into the USA Track & Field Masters Hall of Fame. He coaches for the Cal Coast Track Club, California Triathlon Club, and La Canada High School, and he’s led his clubs to 19 national championships in cross-country and road racing. He lives in Pasadena, California, and competes for the Cal Coast Track Club.



THE **5K** DEMANDS THE SPEED OF A MILER AND THE ENDURANCE OF A MARATHONER.

To run your fastest 5K, you'll need smart preparation. In this focused, no-nonsense guide, celebrated running coach Pete Magill lays out the 25 crucial keys to running your best race. With wisdom gained from setting multiple American and world age-group records, as well as leading his team to 19 USA national championship titles, Magill shows how you can achieve top running fitness and race readiness. Whether you are new to the distance or toeing the line again for a personal best, *Fast 5K* is a must-have resource for reaching your goals.

Fast 5K offers crucial keys to unlock your fastest race:

- ▶ Figure out optimal training volume and intensity
- ▶ Pace tempo runs for maximum benefit
- ▶ Strengthen and build muscle fibers with hill running
- ▶ Design strength, plyo, and technique routines that really work
- ▶ Prevent injury with strategic tapering, recovery, and drills
- ▶ Race tactically from the start line to the finish

With **12-WEEK** and **16-WEEK TRAINING PLANS** to suit runners of all abilities, *Fast 5K* is the most crucial key of all to running your very best race.

PETE MAGILL is a world-class 5K runner, with multiple American and world age-group records in track & field and road racing, and is a 5-time USA Masters Cross Country Runner of the Year. He is a coach, columnist, and author of *SpeedRunner*, *Build Your Running Body*, and *The Born Again Runner*.