

FREE PROGRAM

Your 4 Week Back to Running Plan

A gentle, research-backed program designed for busy parents ready to rebuild their running, one walk/jog at a time.

This is for you if...

You used to run. Maybe before kids, maybe years ago. And you want to get back to it but you're not quite sure what it should look like. Maybe you've tried before, gone out too hard, and ended up sore, frustrated, or just quietly giving up.

This program is different. It's built around one idea: **consistency beats intensity**. We're not chasing pace. We're not grinding through sessions. We're building a habit that fits your life as a parent, using a walk/jog approach that research shows is the safest and most effective way to rebuild your running base.

Three sessions a week. Twenty to thirty minutes each. That's all it takes to start.

The principles behind this plan

THE TALK TEST

Every jog interval should be at a pace where you could speak in full sentences. Research has validated this as an accurate marker of your aerobic threshold, the zone where your body builds endurance most efficiently. If you can't talk, slow down. There is no shame in that.

RPE 3 TO 4 OUT OF 10

Rate of perceived exertion is your internal speedometer. A 3 to 4 means it feels "comfortable but purposeful". You know you're doing something, but you could keep going. This is your Zone 2, where the real aerobic adaptations happen.

NON-CONSECUTIVE DAYS

Your muscles, joints and tendons need time to adapt to the impact of running. Research shows that rest days between sessions allow tissue to rebuild stronger. This is especially important in the first few weeks back.

CONSISTENCY OVER VOLUME

Studies show it takes roughly 6 weeks of training at least 3 times per week to begin forming an exercise habit. This 4-week program gets you well on the way, and the goal is to keep showing up, not to log big numbers.

Week 1 GETTING OUT THE DOOR

This week is about one thing: showing up. The jog intervals are short and the walking is generous. Your body needs time to remember what impact feels like. Your bones, tendons and muscles all respond to this new stimulus. Don't skip the warm-up walk. It matters more than you think.

Session 1

~22 min

STRUCTURE

5 min brisk walk warm-up → **1 min jog / 2 min walk × 4** → 5 min walk cool-down

●●●●●●●●●● RPE 3/10

Session 2

~22 min

STRUCTURE

5 min brisk walk warm-up → **1 min jog / 2 min walk × 4** → 5 min walk cool-down

●●●●●●●●●● RPE 3/10

Session 3

~25 min

STRUCTURE

5 min brisk walk warm-up → **1 min jog / 2 min walk × 5** → 5 min walk cool-down

●●●●●●●●●● RPE 3/10

On your rest days, a gentle walk, stretch or light movement is great. The goal is daily movement of some kind, not daily running.

Week 2 FINDING YOUR RHYTHM

You're increasing the jog intervals while keeping the walking recovery. The ratio starts to even out. If last week felt hard, repeat it. There is absolutely no rush. Progress is earned by consistency, not by pushing through when you're not ready.

Session 1

~24 min

STRUCTURE

5 min brisk walk warm-up → **2 min jog / 2 min walk × 4** → 3 min walk cool-down

●●●●●○○○○○ RPE 3 to 4/10

Session 2

~26 min

STRUCTURE

5 min brisk walk warm-up → **2 min jog / 1.5 min walk × 5** → 3.5 min walk cool-down

●●●●●○○○○○ RPE 3 to 4/10

Session 3

~27 min

STRUCTURE

5 min brisk walk warm-up → **3 min jog / 2 min walk × 4** → 2 min walk cool-down

●●●●●○○○○○ RPE 4/10

Feeling it in your legs? That's normal. If you're sore beyond mild discomfort or it's affecting how you walk, take an extra rest day before your next session.

Week 3

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Now you're spending more time jogging than walking. The walk breaks are still there. They are a tool, not a crutch. Your cardiovascular system adapts faster than your muscles and connective tissue, so the walking gives your body the recovery it needs between efforts even when your lungs feel fine.

Session 1

~26 min

STRUCTURE

5 min brisk walk warm-up → **4 min jog / 1.5 min walk × 3** → 4.5 min walk cool-down

●●●●●○○○○○ RPE 4/10

Session 2

~27 min

STRUCTURE

5 min brisk walk warm-up → **5 min jog / 1 min walk × 3** → 4 min walk cool-down

●●●●●○○○○○ RPE 4/10

Session 3

~28 min

STRUCTURE

5 min brisk walk warm-up → **6 min jog / 1 min walk × 3** → 2 min walk cool-down

●●●●●○○○○○ RPE 4/10

By now you'll notice the jog intervals are starting to feel easier. That's your aerobic system adapting. Your heart is getting more efficient with every session.

Week 4 RUNNING WITH INTENTION

This is the week you start to feel like a runner again. The walk breaks shrink and you'll attempt your first continuous run. Remember: the pace stays easy. If you need to add a walk break during a longer jog, do it. That is not failure, that is smart training.

Session 1

~27 min

STRUCTURE

5 min brisk walk warm-up → **8 min jog / 1 min walk × 2** → 4 min walk cool-down

●●●●●○○○○○ RPE 4/10

Session 2

~27 min

STRUCTURE

5 min brisk walk warm-up → **10 min jog / 1 min walk / 8 min jog** → 3 min walk cool-down

●●●●●○○○○○ RPE 4/10

Session 3

~28 min

STRUCTURE

5 min brisk walk warm-up → **18 to 20 min continuous easy jog** → 3 min walk cool-down

●●●●●○○○○○ RPE 4/10

Session 3 is your milestone. 18 to 20 minutes of continuous running. If you get there, brilliant. If you need a walk break at the 12 minute mark, that's still a massive win from where you started 4 weeks ago.

Why this approach works

Walk breaks are not cheating. They are strategy

Walking intervals between jog efforts serve the same purpose as rest periods between sets in the gym. They allow your tissues to recover between bouts of impact, letting you accumulate more total time on your feet without overloading muscles and connective tissue that haven't adapted to running yet. Clinical return-to-running protocols universally use this walk/jog method because it produces better long-term outcomes than jumping straight into continuous running. ***Read the research (PMC)***

Avoid single-session spikes

A large-scale study of over 5,200 runners published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine found that the biggest injury risk came not from gradual weekly mileage increases, but from sudden jumps in a single session. This plan keeps each session's increase small and spread across the week. *Frandsen et al., 2025 (BJSM)*

The talk test is validated science

Research has shown the talk test accurately corresponds with your first ventilatory threshold, the exact boundary between efficient aerobic training and harder anaerobic work. One study found it produced the same improvements in VO2max and lactate threshold as heart-rate-zone training, without needing any equipment. *Foster et al., 2008 (PubMed)*

Consistency builds the habit

A 2024 meta-analysis on habit formation found the median time to automaticity is 59 to 66 days, not the often-quoted 21. Separate research suggests exercising at least three to four times per week for six weeks is the minimum threshold to establish an exercise habit. This plan gets you halfway there and sets the foundation for what comes next. *Singh et al., 2024 (PubMed)*

Your body adapts in layers

Your cardiovascular system responds to training within days. More red blood cells, stronger heart contractions. But your bones, tendons and ligaments take weeks to months. Research on bone remodelling shows that structures can actually be temporarily weaker for about a month while they adapt to new stress. The gradual progression in this plan respects that timeline. *Franklyn & Oakes, 2012 (IntechOpen)*

Making it work as a parent

Lower the stakes

Some days you'll only have 15 minutes. Do 15 minutes. A shortened session still counts as showing up. The worst thing you can do is skip entirely because you can't do it "properly."

Lay your kit out the night before

Remove every barrier between you and the door. Shoes by the bed. Clothes on the chair. Coffee maker programmed. The less you have to think, the more likely you are to go.

Anchor it to your routine

Tie your run to something that already happens. Right after school drop-off, during a nap window, or as the first thing before the household wakes up. Habit research shows that pairing a new behaviour with an existing cue dramatically increases follow-through.

Mark the calendar

Put an X on a physical calendar for every session you complete. This "don't break the chain" method works because it gives you an immediate visual reward and taps into our natural reluctance to break a streak.

It doesn't have to be pretty

Buggy runs, treadmill sessions while the kids watch TV, laps of the park while they're at football practice. It all counts. The venue doesn't matter. The consistency does.

Ready for what comes next?

This 4-week plan is just the beginning. If you want a personalised program that fits around your life as a parent, with proper coaching, accountability, and a plan that evolves with you, Building Balance can help.

Explore Coaching Options

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