How many times have you heard the saying, “Life is a marathon, not a sprint”? I’ve heard this saying a great amount of times usually in reference to the fitness industry, and I could imagine you have heard it in discussions or readings as well. It's meaning holds true—marathons take longer to complete than sprints, and in order to achieve a marathon, we need to build a strategy and plan to learn how to achieve it. Great things take time to build.

I’ve never run a marathon, but I have run a 5k. I remember being at my first 5k a few years ago. I was an advocate for exercise, but I was not a frequent runner and did not properly train for this 5k. My daily exercise was lifting weights on the strength floor of the Carpenter Sports Building, but very little cardio or endurance training. On 5k day, I was brave enough to begin at the starting line with all the veteran runners. When the horn blew, I immediately dashed off the starting line which felt like my top speed. Without exaggeration, it was probably 2 minutes later when I began walking the 5k huffing and puffing with my heart pounding out of my chest. I legitimately felt like I was going to pass out and collapse from the intensity and effort that I just put my body through. I still had 3 miles to go. Although I could have snuck away to the UD Creamery, I spent the rest of the 3 miles walking and jogging on and off until I crossed that finish line. Has anyone else experienced something like this?

“Life is a marathon, not a sprint” could not hold more true than this example above. If I was a little bit more experienced and prepared for this 5k race in advance, I probably would have known to not sprint off the starting line. If I was a little bit more experienced and prepared, maybe I would have had the endurance to keep up with my counterparts. If I was a little bit more experienced and prepared, I would have felt more confident in my ability to complete this race. Marathons, 5ks, and any hard obstacles or challenges in life all take time and practice to train the mind and body for its duration and capacity of work.

Luckily, there are many training programs out there to help individuals enhance their fitness in a variety of ways to help achieve their goals. One program, called the “Couch to 5k 5k Trainer” is a training plan to get new runners from having no running experience to being able to complete 3.1 miles, or a 5k. It is an 8-week plan that includes three workouts per week for 20 to 30 minutes. This schedule gets beginners used working out on a consistent basis, while also allows their bodies (and minds) to “get used” to running.

The Couch to 5k (C25k) 5k Trainer app uses a training called interval training in its 8-week program. Interval Training is a type of training that involves a series of high intensity exercise interspersed with rest or relief periods. The high-intensity periods are typically at or close to anaerobic exercise, while the recovery periods involve activity of lower intensity. Varying the intensity of effort exercises the heart muscle, providing a cardiovascular workout, improving aerobic capacity and permitting the person to exercise for longer and/or at more intense levels. For C25k specifically, every workout that is completed is made up of intervals of work and recovery. The work consists of running at a higher intensity for a period of time, while the recovery consists of moving at a slower pace to lower the intensity.
The first week contains longer bouts of recovery in comparison to the work. Especially for a beginner runner, this will allow the runner’s body to accommodate to the stresses that are being put onto the body. Each week, the recovery time will start to become shorter as the bouts of work begin to increase in duration. This will allow the body to continue to adapt to the stress, and begin to build more endurance and stamina. By the final week of the program, there are no breaks for recovery. The runner at this point should have built enough stamina to go 3.1 miles without any breaks in between.

Starting Monday, August 31 through Sunday, October 25, Employee Health and Wellbeing is hosting a “Couch to 5k” accountability group for runners to download the “C25k 5k Trainer” app or “10k Trainer by C25k” to track their running progress throughout the next 8 weeks and connect to other employees using Microsoft Teams and Zoom who are also participating. By using Microsoft Teams and Zoom, employees can share information, tips, and motivation to one another to keep each other accountable while completing a challenging training program such as this one. Not only will this program help build your endurance, but it will give you the skills of preparation, support, and confidence in completing your first 5k.

Learn more about the Couch to 5k Accountability Group by attending our interest meeting on Thursday, August 20 at 12pm via Zoom. Register in advance here. If you are unable to attend, please email me at cfinch@udel.edu for more information about the program. Let’s prepare for the next virtual 5k race together!

-Chelsea Finch