

Training with Kids

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Imagine this scenario: You've planned to run a fun-run in a few months. You've secretly set yourself a time you would like to achieve and know you will have to get fitter to accomplish this target. You have kids. You know you've got to do the running mileage, but have you got the time? The training commitment is time consuming, but so are children. You want this goal. You want to keep your family happy. You still have higher priorities in your life but in this moment in time, this is very important to you. So how do you complete your training and balance a healthy family lifestyle?

From personal past experience as a fitness trainer, the most common worry when preparing an exercise program is time. Some of us work from sun-rise to sun-set, some of us balance a little bit of work with a lot of parenting duties and some of us want to exercise more but find it hard to get a babysitter, or find it difficult to get an hour or so away from cries, fights, whines and nappies. The basic answer to all this is YES, you can do it if you really want to. There are many ways you can get your 'training' completed and balance it in with your family lifestyle.

While I was pregnant with my first son, I can remember stressing about caring for a baby and still completing my running sessions. Everyone around me worked throughout the day, my husband left for work at 7am every morning and often stayed late to finish his job. To enable myself not to miss sessions, I had to commit myself to a time to meet my training group every evening whether my husband was back from work or not. As the year progressed (and more often in the winter months), I would bring my son with me in the pram. Most days we met at a fauna reserve, we would stick to the less bumpy and flat terrain to complete our warm up, and 'the coach' would kindly watch the baby in one eye and his troops in the other while we completed our work out. I must admit, it is a lot easier to not worry about bringing the baby along, especially on those wet and windy days, but in my mind, I had two duties for that hour and I had to accomplish both in a positive fashion and simply adapt to the situation.

Adapting to situations is part of the plan. When you set yourself this race goal, you

have a journey to take. Most journeys are not straight and smooth, so we aim to complete what we can in the best way possible and unfortunately to increase your running you need to do at least a good portion of plain old running! Basing your program around steady-state runs will form the core of your weeks leading up to this race and even better still, will develop a tough base for future fun-run ambitions. Here are some tips to help you make the most of your limited time.

Tips for your busy week

In addition to some longer runs on the weekend, steady runs during the week will fill the other portion of your training programs. These runs can be pretty basic and you just have to 'cover the ground'. The pace is irrelevant which makes it all the more stress free, even if you have to take the children with you!

Here are some ideas:

Pram Running

I'm a huge fan of pram running. One of the first things I went out to buy after my first son was born was a basic running pram. To be honest, I didn't think I'd run with it much, but the pram did so much mileage during my sons first three years, it ended up wearing out! So I read up on the best-designed pram for running, which ended up being a 'Baby Jogger' pram, and it is sensational. I have never looked back. Running with the pram is great for your shorter easier runs. It forces you to go easy, which is one main reason I began doing it. For three mornings a week, I drop my eldest son to kinder, return home and set out for a light run with my 18month old in the pram. I stick to a flat 5k loop that has good quality footpaths so it is enjoyable and quiet effortless to keep the tempo of both running and pushing.

Pram running can also be made into a workout especially if you want to increase your heart rate during a run. Making sure you have a decent pram designed for running, you can set yourself a course over undulating terrain or take the pram over grass or gravel making sure before hand that the ground is not too rough. This will naturally increase your heart rate. Another idea with the pram is a bit of 'Fartlek'. As you run along give the pram a push so you have to put in an effort to

catch it. To be safe, use the prams safety hand strap so it doesn't get too far ahead of you. A little effort here and there with chasing the pram, pushing it up a hill or trudging around an oval can become a really good workout and makes running alone, all the more easier!



Family Run

Not much is better than exercising with the whole family. It makes it enjoyable and it gives the children lots of fresh air for a good nights sleep! If you have young children, it is easy to get them organised in the pram and with your partner, agree on a place to meet and/or the path they are going to travel along to get to the meeting point. You go off for your run and while

the rest of the family are walking along leisurely; you can keep looping around so you see them every few minutes. I've done this many times when I've found it hard to motivate myself to go out for an easy run. Remember the pace you run at on these runs is irrelevant so its actually quite good fun to keep running up and passing your family members and even better if one is old enough to ride alongside you on their bicycle.

You can vary these runs by instead of running once up a hill, turn around and run up it a few more times. Important not to go too hard and remember it is all about time on your feet. This type of training run allows you to cover the distance and it can involve the other members of your family with minimal interference to your training. Plus, they see you in action and feel a part of your journey toward this goal. Once the destination is reached, you can complete your run with your little cheer squad, have a stretch with the kids and walk home together.

Mornings

It's understandable that some people don't quite have this amount of time to work out. However, if you have set yourself a goal, there are not a lot of excuses to miss training in my book! As we enter our summer, we have beautiful light mornings and dreamy long evenings. There is enough motivation with the warm weather to get up at dawn, put your kit on and head out the door when the rest of the family still sleeps. I have a training partner, Gerry, who is about 90kg. He is keen to keep his weight under control with regular running but work and family gets him tied down most days. He told me the other day he got up at 5:30am and went out for a run. He ran alone at the crack of dawn through the bushy fauna reserve and he said he felt wonderful. He ran like nothing in the world mattered to him. There is certainly something special about seeing the sun come up while you are out chasing your dreams. The air is crisp, the roads are quiet and it feels as though you have all the time in the world to concentrate on your task. At dawn, most children are still sound asleep (we hope!) and a simple decision of aiming to get up when the alarm clock strikes bears guilt if you do not comply. The other morning, I set my watch to wake me up at 6am. After contemplating staying in a cozy bed, I was forced to get up due to that feeling of remorse. I stepped out the door and eased into my run. After twenty minutes I found myself at an oval. I decided to stride out from goal post to goal

post and jog the recovery. I completed my run in high spirits and my workout was complete for the day. The run was ticked off and I'm one step more confident toward my aim. The moral, get up and at them and you will feel great for it.

Evenings

The same goes with the evenings. The onset of dusk is magic and another enjoyable time to run. One of my favorite evening runs is along the foreshore of the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria. The sunset is often clear and the reflection on the bay is overwhelming. When a day of work is over and the dinners have been made, sometimes this hour in the evening is the only time I can get to complete a workout. Usually my partner, or another family member can be with the children watching over them while they have their bath and enjoy their evening meal. Before they are done, I have already returned, mission accomplished!

Make the most of the weekend

Weekend morning runs are to be enjoyed, whether it is either Saturday or Sunday. Try to make this/these runs a little longer in length than your weekly runs and these longer runs are the key to most running programs. If there is just one run each week that you do, it should be this one. Pre-arrange this with your partner and 'make a deal' that you will spend the whole afternoon doing family things such as visiting the beach, going swimming or even a trip to the park and most importantly don't complain of being 'too tired' to do

anything. This will work to benefit everyone – the family will be happy everyone is together and you will be proud that you have ticked of the important run and got it out of your mind for the rest of the day – which mentally promotes better recovery (and physically encourages recuperation if you've entered the water!).

You can do it

It is really important to work on the simple things when sometimes it appears you are putting to many eggs in the basket. I've always been a big believer in if you want it, work at it and you will get it. Having a family life as a priority actually keeps things simple. Children offer energy that should be a magnet to us all. We all know, children thrive on routine and our bodies thrive on forms of routine too. One thing about running is that, although we work alone, it can be a real team sport. Your family is part of your support group and it is important they are involved. By including them into your training schedules on a daily, weekly or even monthly basis, they will eventually know that it is 'your time' to go out for your training run. The other day, I took a rest day and my son kept asking, "Why aren't you going for a run mum?" Life with a family is always busy, but it should never be too busy to complete the things that you are passionate about. So get cracking on this goal you've set yourself, work hard to complete your set mileage/training plan and get those kids out there helping you achieve it!

