

TRAINING PROGRAMME

# Learn-to-Row Starter Plan

Your first six weeks of rowing, made simple

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**FOR**

Complete beginners in New Zealand, on the erg and the water

**LENGTH**

6 weeks

**EACH WEEK**

2-3 sessions

**KIT**

An indoor rower, plus water sessions with a Rowing New Zealand club

# Learn-to-Row Starter Plan

Your first six weeks of rowing, made simple - arrive at your Learn to Row course already fit and confident, with a good, repeatable stroke.

## DO THIS

- ✓ **Follow the sessions in order** - each has a warm-up, a main set and a cool-down.
- ✓ **Learn the sequence:** legs, then body, then arms on the drive; reverse it coming back.
- ✓ **Keep the recovery slower than the drive,** and the rate low and relaxed.
- ✓ **Do the water outings with your club** whenever they are offered.

## AVOID

- Chasing speed or a low split in week one.
- Rushing up the slide.
- Pulling with the arms before the legs.
- Skipping the warm-up.

## THE PLAN AT A GLANCE

| PHASE            | WEEKS  | WHAT YOU DO                                            |
|------------------|--------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| First strokes    | Wk 1-2 | Meet the machine and learn the legs-body-arms sequence |
| Build the stroke | Wk 3-4 | Add length and rhythm; clean, calm blade handling      |
| Put it together  | Wk 5-6 | Longer pieces and your first benchmark row             |

The full six-week plan, a talk-test effort guide and the coaching detail follow. Row within your comfort, warm up, and stop for any pain.

# The plan, week by week

| WK | FOCUS               | SESSION 1                                                                                                                                               | SESSION 2                                                                                                                                                                     | SESSION 3                                                                                                                                                  |
|----|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Meet the machine    | <b>First strokes</b> ~40 min<br>4 x 5 min easy at rate 18-20, with 2 min rest between. Count "one-two" on the drive and "one-two-three" on the recovery | <b>Recovery control</b> ~35 min<br>20 min easy at rate 18. For the first 10 min, pause for 1 second at the finish each stroke; then row continuously                          |                                                                                                                                                            |
| 2  | Build the habit     | <b>Steady rowing</b> ~40 min<br>2 x 10 min easy at rate 18-20, with 3 min rest between. Keep the length and rate the same throughout                    | <b>First water outing</b> ~60-90 min<br>Club outing - learn to sit the boat still, feel the balance and follow the stroke of the person in front. Your coach runs the session | <b>Benchmark row</b> ~30 min<br>Row 8 min at a steady, even effort and write down the distance you cover. This is your benchmark - you repeat it in week 6 |
| 3  | Add a little length | <b>Steady erg</b> ~45 min<br>30 min continuous at rate 20-22, holding one steady split the whole way                                                    | <b>Water skills</b> ~60-90 min<br>Club outing - squaring and feathering the blade, balance drills and short bits of continuous rowing                                         | <b>Steady intervals</b> ~40 min<br>5 x 4 min at rate 22, with 1 min easy between. Aim for the same split on every rep                                      |
| 4  | Feel the rhythm     | <b>Rate ladder</b> ~40 min<br>4 x 5 min at rates 18, 20, 22 then 20, with 1 min easy between. Keep the stroke length full as the rate rises             | <b>Water outing</b> ~60-90 min<br>Club outing - longer stretches of continuous rowing, applying the rate control from the erg                                                 | <b>Steady with bursts</b> ~40 min<br>20 min steady at rate 20, with a 10-stroke firmer burst every 3 min                                                   |
| 5  | Build fitness       | <b>Longer steady</b> ~50 min<br>35 min continuous at rate 20-22, one steady split                                                                       | <b>Water outing</b> ~60-90 min<br>Club outing - a longer paddle, focused on staying relaxed and rowing well when a little tired                                               | <b>Pyramid</b> ~45 min<br>2, 4, 6, 4, 2 min steady at rate 22, with 1-2 min easy between each piece                                                        |
| 6  | Put it together     | <b>Continuous row</b> ~50 min<br>40 min continuous, easy to steady - your longest row yet                                                               | <b>Water outing</b> ~60-90 min<br>Club outing - a proper outing from start to finish. You are a rower now                                                                     | <b>Benchmark again</b> ~30 min<br>Row 8 min at a steady, even effort and note the distance. Compare it to your week-2 benchmark                            |

Warm up and cool down on every session - the listed times include both; on the interval days build for about ten minutes first. The coloured edge of each session shows its effort zone (the effort guide is a couple of pages on). Coaching cues and the full detail are in the sections that follow.

# About this plan

Welcome to rowing. This plan takes you from your very first stroke to rowing comfortably and confidently over six weeks. It mixes indoor rowing (the "erg"), where you learn the movement safely, with water outings run by your club.

It is built to sit alongside the learn-to-row course run by your local Rowing New Zealand club – do the erg sessions to arrive fit and ahead, and use the water outings to put it into practice. Every session is fully laid out: a warm-up, the main set, and a cool-down. There is no pressure on speed – a good, repeatable stroke now makes everything later come easily.

## HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

**Follow the sessions in order.** Each one shows a warm-up, a main set and a cool-down, plus a rough time and a single technical focus. The times include the warm-up and cool-down.

**Do the water outings with your club** whenever they are offered – they replace an erg session that week. If a week only has erg access, do the erg sessions and you will still progress nicely.

**Judge effort by the "talk test", not numbers** (see the effort guide overleaf). Keep the stroke rate low while you learn – length and rhythm move the boat, not spinning the handle. New coaching terms are explained at the back.

## GETTING STARTED IN NEW ZEALAND

Rowing in Aotearoa New Zealand is run by **Rowing New Zealand**. There is no single national beginner scheme – you start by joining a local club, which runs its own learn-to-row course. Sort these things through that club:

- **Find a club.** Use Rowing New Zealand's [Club Directory](#) to find a club near you and its **learn-to-row** course.
- **Join up.** You register as a member through **Rowing Connect**, using your club's link.
- **Season.** The domestic season runs **September to April**, so most beginners start in spring – and the erg is ideal for building fitness over winter.
- **Water safety.** New Zealand rowing runs under a lifejacket exemption (**Maritime Rule 91**) governed by the **Rowing Water Safety Code**. You must **carry a flotation belt** when rowing unaccompanied, and clubs commonly ask that you are confident in the water before going afloat.

Your club follows the Rowing Water Safety Code on the water – listen to your coach, and check the current guidance on [rowingnz.kiwi](http://rowingnz.kiwi).

## Effort guide

No heart-rate monitor needed. Judge how hard you are working by how well you can talk – the "talk test" – together with your stroke rate (strokes per minute, shown on the monitor).

| ZONE                                                                                            | WHAT IT IS    | PACE            | RATE      | FEELS LIKE                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------------------|
|  <b>Focus</b>  | Technique     | Slow, precise   | 16-20 s/m | Light – all about the stroke |
|  <b>Easy</b>   | Recovery pace | Chatting pace   | 18-20 s/m | Hold a full conversation     |
|  <b>Steady</b> | Working pace  | Short sentences | 20-24 s/m | Working, breathing up        |

**Before you start:** This is general training guidance, not medical advice. Check with a doctor before beginning any new exercise plan, especially if you have an injury or health condition. Warm up, listen to your body, and stop if you feel pain.

## Coaching notes

### The rowing stroke

Every stroke has four parts. The **catch** is the start: knees bent, shins vertical, arms straight, body leaning slightly forward from the hips. The **drive** is the push – legs down first, then swing the body open, then draw the hands into the body. The **finish** is the end of the drive: legs flat, a slight lean back, handle at the bottom of your ribs. The **recovery** is the slide back to the catch. Power comes from the legs, not the arms – the legs do most of the work on every single stroke.

### The stroke, step by step

- 1 Sit at the **catch**: knees bent, shins vertical, arms straight, leaning slightly forward from the hips.
- 2 **Drive** with the legs – push them flat. Only then swing the body open. Only then draw the hands in to your ribs.
- 3 **Finish** tall: legs flat, a small lean back, handle to the bottom of the ribcage, elbows drawn past the body.
- 4 **Recover** in reverse: hands away from the body first, then tip forward from the hips, then bend the knees and slide to the catch.
- 5 Mind the **rhythm**: a quick, powerful drive and a slow, controlled recovery. Count "one-two" on the drive and "one-two-three" on the recovery to stop yourself rushing.

### Setting up the machine

Sit tall and set the monitor to **eye level**. Strap your feet so the strap crosses the **ball of your foot**. On a Concept2, set the **damper** (the lever on the fan) to **3-5, not 10** – a lower setting rewards good technique and protects your back. The two numbers worth watching on the monitor are the **split** (your time per 500m) and the **rate** (strokes per minute). Chase clean technique, not big numbers.

## Common beginner faults

| COMMON FAULT                      | WHAT TO DO INSTEAD                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Rushing the recovery</b>       | Slow the slide down. The recovery should take longer than the drive - use the "one-two / one-two-three" count. |
| <b>Bending the arms too early</b> | Keep the arms straight until the legs are almost flat. The hands draw in last, not first.                      |
| <b>Opening the back too soon</b>  | Push the legs first and hold your body angle until the legs are about halfway down.                            |
| <b>Shooting the slide</b>         | The seat and the handle should move together. Do not slam the seat back while the handle stays still.          |
| <b>Gripping too hard</b>          | Hook your fingers over the handle with light thumbs and loose wrists. A tight grip tires your forearms fast.   |
| <b>Looking down</b>               | Eyes up, sit tall. Looking down rounds your back and shortens the stroke.                                      |

## Breathing and staying relaxed

Breathe **out on the drive** (the effort) and **in on the recovery**. On harder pieces, two breaths a stroke is fine. Keep your face, shoulders and grip relaxed - tension anywhere steals energy and shortens your stroke. If you notice you are tightening up, take a breath and let the shoulders drop.

## On the water

The erg teaches the movement; the water adds balance and timing. Expect it to feel wobbly at first - that is completely normal, and it settles quickly. Sit still between strokes, keep your hands moving smoothly, and follow the person in front of you. Always listen to your coach. Carry a flotation belt when rowing unaccompanied (a requirement under New Zealand rowing's Maritime Rule 91 exemption), and be confident in the water - many clubs ask for this before you go afloat.

## Tracking your progress

In week 2 you row 8 minutes and note the distance. In week 6 you do exactly the same test - same warm-up, same effort. The extra metres are your six weeks of work made visible. Keep a note of your splits along the way too; watching your 500m time come down is the best motivation there is.

## Rowing words explained

|                         |                                                                                     |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Catch</b>            | The start of the stroke, with the blade about to go into the water.                 |
| <b>Drive</b>            | The powerful part of the stroke: legs, then body, then arms.                        |
| <b>Finish</b>           | The end of the drive - handle drawn into the body, legs flat.                       |
| <b>Recovery</b>         | The controlled slide from the finish back to the catch.                             |
| <b>Rate (s/m)</b>       | Stroke rate - the number of strokes you take per minute.                            |
| <b>Split</b>            | Your time to row 500m, shown on the monitor. Lower is faster.                       |
| <b>Ratio</b>            | The balance of a quick drive to a slower recovery.                                  |
| <b>Square / feather</b> | Turning the blade upright to take the water (square) or flat to come out (feather). |
| <b>Blade</b>            | The oar.                                                                            |
| <b>Outing</b>           | A training session on the water.                                                    |
| <b>Erg</b>              | The indoor rowing machine.                                                          |
| <b>Crew</b>             | The people rowing a boat together.                                                  |