Back to Rowing: 4-Week Plan

A free three-session-a-week plan for rowers returning after a month or more away

THE ROWING TUTOR

This plan is for someone who has rowed before and has had a break of a month or more, without injury. It builds from 15 minutes to 30 minutes of continuous rowing over four weeks, at an easy effort throughout.

If you have been injured or unwell, get clearance from your GP or physio before you start.

How to use this plan

- **Leave your old splits alone.** You do not need pace targets for these four weeks. Row by rate and effort, and let the pace be whatever it is.
- **Move days if you need to.** The plan uses Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. Any three days work if you keep a rest day between sessions.
- **Do not add extra.** You may feel you could do more, particularly in Week 1. Your heart and lungs often feel ready before your hands, back and legs are.
- **Warm up and cool down every time.** Session times in the tables do not include them.
- **Write down what you do.** Note the time, average pace, rate and how it felt.

How to read the targets

- **Rate** is strokes per minute, written r20 for 20 strokes a minute.
- **RPE** is how hard the work feels from 1 to 10. RPE 3 is easy enough to hold a full conversation. RPE 10 is everything you have.
- **Rest** means light paddling or sitting still. In `3x5:00/1:00`, row 5 minutes three times with a minute's rest after each one.

Warm-up: 5 minutes. Very easy rowing at r16–18, building a little in the last minute.

Cool-down: 3 to 5 minutes. Paddle at r18, RPE 2, then stretch your hamstrings, hips and lower back if that helps you.

Drag factor: use the same number each session. As a rule of thumb, many home rowers sit around 110 to 130. If in doubt, start at the lower end.

The plan at a glance

Rowing minutes leave out warm-ups, cool-downs and rests.

Week	Purpose	Rowing minutes	Longest row
1	Get the stroke back	45	15 minutes
2	Add time	56	20 minutes
3	Add time	65	25 minutes
4	Reach 30 minutes	74	30 minutes

Week 1: Get the stroke back

Focus: short, smooth rows. Think legs, body, arms on the drive, and take your time on the recovery.

Day	Session	Detail	Target
Mon	Steady row	15 minutes continuous	r18, RPE 3
Tue	Rest	Off the erg	–
Wed	Short pieces	3x5:00/1:00	r18–20, RPE 3
Thu	Rest	Off the erg	–
Fri	Rest	Off the erg	–
Sat	Steady row	15 minutes continuous	r18–20, RPE 3
Sun	Rest	A walk is fine	–

Week 2: Add time

Focus: a little more time at the same effort. Check how your hands and lower back are coping.

Day	Session	Detail	Target
Mon	Steady row	18 minutes continuous	r18–20, RPE 3
Tue	Rest	Off the erg	–
Wed	Short pieces	3x6:00/1:00	r18–20, RPE 3–4
Thu	Rest	Off the erg	–
Fri	Rest	Off the erg	–
Sat	Steady row	20 minutes continuous	r18–20, RPE 3–4
Sun	Rest	Off the erg	–

Week 3: Add more time

Focus: the Saturday row gets longer. Keep the effort where it was, even if the pace has started to come back.

Day	Session	Detail	Target
Mon	Steady row	20 minutes continuous	r18–20, RPE 3–4
Tue	Rest	Off the erg	–
Wed	Short pieces	4x5:00/1:00	r20, RPE 4
Thu	Rest	Off the erg	–
Fri	Rest	Off the erg	–
Sat	Steady row	25 minutes continuous	r18–20, RPE 3–4
Sun	Rest	Off the erg	–

Week 4: Reach 30 minutes

Focus: the longest row so far, plus slightly firmer pieces on Wednesday. Finish Saturday feeling you could have kept going.

Day	Session	Detail	Target
Mon	Steady row	20 minutes continuous	r18–20, RPE 3–4
Tue	Rest	Off the erg	–
Wed	Longer pieces	3x8:00/1:30	r20–22, RPE 4–5
Thu	Rest	Off the erg	–
Fri	Rest	Off the erg	–
Sat	Long steady	30 minutes continuous	r18–20, RPE 3–4
Sun	Rest	Note how the month felt	–

If it feels too much

- **A session felt too hard:** repeat that week before moving on. There is no prize for finishing in four weeks.
- **Week 1 is a struggle:** as a rule of thumb, if you cannot row 15 minutes at RPE 3, or you have been away for a long time, start with the first month plan at therowingtutor.com/first-month-on-the-erg/.
- **Missed one session:** carry on with the next one. Do not squeeze it in on a rest day.
- **Missed a week or more:** go back a week.
- **Sore hands:** some tenderness is common after a break. Hold the handle in your fingers rather than clenching it in your palms.

Safety

This plan is general training guidance, not medical advice. See your GP or a physio before you start if you have been injured or unwell, or if you have a heart condition, high blood pressure, a back or joint problem, or are pregnant.

Stop straight away if you get chest pain, dizziness, faintness or unusual breathlessness. If chest pain does not settle quickly, call 999. Do not row through sharp pain in your back, knees or wrists. Mild muscle tiredness is common when you return, but sharp or lasting pain is not something to push through.

What next

If you finished Week 4 feeling in control, you are ready for the free 8-Week 2k Plan, which assumes you can already row for 30 minutes without stopping. You can find it, and every other plan, at therowingtutor.com/plans/. If you are not ready for that, repeat Week 4 and keep the effort easy.

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