MARATHON HANDBOOK GUIDES

HOW TO TRAIN FOR AND RUN A MARATHON

DE-CONSTRUCTING HOW TO GET TO THE FINISH LINE

- EXCLUSIVE TRAINING PROGRAMMES
- SHOES, GEAR + NUTRITION EXPLAINED
- GET START-LINE READY IN 3 MONTHS
# Marathon Handbook Guide: How to Train for and Run a Marathon

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INTRO
Welcome to Marathon Running 101.

Marathons have entered the modern zeitgeist quite like nothing else.

A running event, based on the distance between the ancient Greek town of Marathon and Athens, is now a cultural lynchpin – every major city in the world hosts their own version of the event, where roads are shut down and crowds turn out. Thousands upon thousands of runners line up, from all walks of life – be them teenager or octogenarians, amputees or artists, sprinters or slowpokes – marathons have become a mass social gathering that is rivalled only by religious events in terms of turn-out.

In recent years, the number of people running marathons has skyrocketed – what was once reserved for the athletic elite and the obsessed is now being tapped into by the weekend runners, househusbands, and the ambitious thirty-something who wants to prove something to herself. It seems that everyone can find some benefit in running a marathon.

This handbook has been written with the novice in mind – it is a compilation of comprehensive and concise information, aimed at preparing you for your upcoming marathon - and getting you to the finish line comfortably.

It is a distillation of practical advice and lessons learned from a group of experienced marathoners – we’ve aimed to keep each chapter concise and effective, keeping things lean and optimal – just like your training should be.

If you’re planning to run your first marathon, you’re in good company – approximately 1.6 million Americans have run marathons, and around 35% of runners at city marathons are running 26.2 miles for the first time.

The good news for you is that many people have done this before. Some have found it easier than others, and those are the people you are going to learn from.

Here’s what we’re going to cover in the chapters that follow:
- **Getting started.** This section is all about preparing you mentally. Why run a marathon, anyway? We look at the mental and physical commitment you’ve made, and discuss what you’ve got ahead of you in the coming weeks and months.

- **Training.** We dive into detail on how to get from your current state to race-ready in a few short months. Marathon training these days is a science, not an art – and the lessons learned from countless other runners can be de-constructed and applied to your own training. In this section, you’ll find detailed guides on assessing your current level of fitness and determining exactly how much training you need to be race-ready, how to train and how to make your own training plan (we include examples and templates).

- **Shoes and gear.** Have the correct shoes and running gear is fundamental for success. We break down every piece of gear you need to run a marathon, and all the optional extras too. We discuss what to look for when you’re buying shoes, shorts and everything else.

- **Nutrition.** Fuel is what gets you round the race, but it comes in many different forms – and everyone’s stomach is different. We look at the various fuelling options to have before and during a race, as well as discussing your fuelling strategy and how to road-test it before the race.

- **Pre-Marathon – the 4 weeks before the marathon.** We explain where your focus should be at various milestones – 4 weeks before the race, 1 week before the race, the night before the race and the morning of the race. Here we discuss tapering and cross-training, diet and mental preparation so you get to the start-line in optimal condition.

- **The Marathon.** The actual marathon is the culmination of all your training in one event. Here we go through what to expect on the day itself – this section contains a lot of advice and tips from experienced marathon runners.

- **Post-Race.** What to expect, how to minimise recovery time – and how to retain your new level of distance running ability.
Consistently, it’s found that the two key elements to successfully and happily completing a marathon are:

- Having a realistic training plan, and following it.
- Choosing a pace for your race day that is achievable, and sticking to it.

If you can follow these two points, then you’re setting yourself up for crossing the finish line with a smile on your face.

Thousands of people per year commit to running marathons in order to get fit, or as a form of achieving a significant goal – but don’t allow themselves the time or preparation in order to do it successfully, or comfortably.

Although almost anyone could get to the finish line of a marathon (by walking, and likely in severe discomfort / injured) our aim is to prepare you to the best of your ability so you cross the finish line and feel fantastic!

In this eBook, we’ve endeavoured to include all the information we think you need to succeed in your first marathon. However, if you still have questions, drop us a line (hi@marathonhandbook.com) and we’ll do our best to help you.

Run Far!

- Marathon Handbook
  www.marathonhandbook.com
GETTING STARTED
WHY RUN A MARATHON ANYWAY?

Marathon running is an epic physical endurance feat – 26.2 miles is way beyond what an average person living in modern society could cover on foot.

For practically anyone, running a marathon involves a serious amount of commitment, training, preparation and – at times – sustained discomfort.

The reasons that people run marathons vary widely – whether it be a personal goal, to raise money for charity, lose weight, get in shape . . . regardless of your reason for signing up for a marathon, here’s a few of the benefits that might help motivate you along the way:

MARATHON TRAINING IS ONE OF THE BEST FORMS OF CARDIO EXERCISE

Regular cardiovascular exercise is key to a healthy lifestyle – it helps prolong life, regulate sleep and keeps your body ticking over smoothly.

Marathon training – i.e. running – is a completely natural form of cardiovascular exercise – in fact, our bodies were designed to do it. It is relatively low-impact, meaning that compared to other forms of cardio work the risk of injury is lower. You can do it at your own pace and length, and all that is required is running shoes, shorts and shirt (though a GPS can help when you’re deep into your training, more on that later…).
Training for a marathon properly means setting training targets and sticking to them. It also means a huge commitment in terms of your own time. This requirement for tracking your progress, and committing to training plans trickles down and can positively influence both your personal and professional life.

If you can demolish a marathon – months and months of training, pain and discomfort – then suddenly that report that’s been hanging over your head doesn’t seem like a big deal.

It’s been demonstrated that willpower acts like a muscle, and the more you exercise your willpower, the more you have available. When you stick to a marathon training plan, you’ll probably realise you have more enthusiasm for making good habits – such as eating well, and scheduling your time more effectively.

Choosing to go for a strenuous run is basically you choosing to be in a state of discomfort for a period of time – if you can train your mind to get used to this and not see it as a big deal, you’ll realise you have the energy to take on more and more in other aspects of your life.

A marathon lifestyle also actively discourages our favourite vices such as drinking and smoking, and encourages healthy eating – if you’re committed to a training programme, healthy eating and avoiding smoking / drinking all contribute to your performance.

RUNNING IS TIME WELL SPENT

Let’s face it – most of us have busy lifestyles . . . we spend much of the day seated, in front of a screen, and when we go home often we get caught up in the tiny distractions that are available to us, rather than spending our free time wisely.

Running is a good use of your time. Simple as that.
In addition to the health benefits, running releases endorphins in your brain – these are your body’s natural painkillers, and they feel good.

Not only do these endorphins help put your mind in a more positive state, but distractions such as cell phones, emails and colleagues that we’re all used to disappears when you go for a run. It’s quality time for you and your brain. Even if you run with a partner, the benefits are still right there.

MARATHONS = FRIENDS AND TRAVEL

Two other benefits of running marathons are the friends you make along the way, and the opportunities you get to travel.

Marathons can be a great way to make friends, or spend quality time with an old friend. In practically every town in the world you’ll find running clubs, and ways to engage with other runners – you’ll almost certainly meet someone with similar goals to yourself.

Likewise, training for a marathon can be a great exercise to do with an old friend or colleague, as you can motivate each other and hold each other accountable for your progress.

Marathons can also provide a great excuse to travel.

If your own local race doesn’t excite you, why not sign up for a marathon two hours away? Or in a city you’ve never visited before? Nowadays, you can find marathons in almost any exotic location you can think of – whether it’s the beaches of Hawaii or the peaks of the Alps.

By picking an exciting location for your marathon, you are helping create a buzz for yourself – another reason to get motivated on the dark mornings when a training run is the last thing you want to do.

People who travel for marathons tend to extend their stays and make a little vacation out of it – for example if you’re going for the New York marathon, why not make it into a long-weekend city break? Use your marathon as an excuse to take a well-deserved vacation.
WHAT TO EXPECT

The journey to the finish line of a marathon is like any great one – it’s long, it requires a lot of effort and pain, there will be setbacks and failures – but there will be a transformation involved, and the reward at the end directly correlates to the amount of effort you put in.

The act of training for – and running – your first marathon is a voyage of discovery.

You are pushing your body farther than it’s been before. Mentally, you will see how you react when faced with fatigue, zero motivation and continuous discomfort.

During training, you have to accept that large parts of your schedule are going to be committed to running. This means a few hours throughout the week, and a long run on weekends – the long run at weekends can be especially encumbering to your personal life, as it cuts out a block of the time you’d usually have set aside for friends or family or hobbies. Bear in mind that you’ll also be more tired after this run, so might not have the energy for that late night dinner party you were invited to.

Your lifestyle will also change in order to prioritise your training.

You might start to look at meals and snacks as ‘fuel’, and start to see TV time as ‘non-running time’.

Injuries and setbacks are also so common that you should accept that they are quite likely – but rather than let them throw a spanner in your training, you should be expecting them, and have a plan in place to address them as soon as they appear.
HOW TO START

Alright – so you’re intrigued by the idea of a marathon, but don’t know how to get going. Here’s the first few steps you should take when you first decide to go for it:

GET THE GEAR

Gear is essential for marathon training, and you want to get it right from day one. Luckily, running is one of the cheapest forms of exercise around, so the initial cost isn’t crazy-expensive. Having said that, it’s important to get decent quality and appropriate equipment – or else you’ll be stopped in your tracks.

The fundamental pieces of equipment you need are your running shoes, shorts and a shirt (depending on where you live you might need extra layers too) – everything else is ‘nice-to-haves’. It’s essential to get these right – especially the shoes.

You may have an old pair of joggers at the back of the wardrobe that were fine when you last wore them five years ago – these will get you started, but you should look to get an appropriate pair of running shoes as soon as you fully commit to your marathon.

Check out our SHOES & GEAR section for comprehensive advice on buying running shoes and getting the right clothing.

A GPS watch is a highly-recommended purchase for anyone serious about marathon training. You can get a reliable one such as the Garmin Forerunner for under $100 – this should be your number one training tool. The GPS watch allows you to monitor your pace while running, which is a fundamental part of a marathon training programme. A decent GPS will also download all your runs to your computer, and allow you to track progress and mileage over weeks and months.
START RUNNING

The next step is to actually go for a run.

Set aside half an hour to go outdoors and see how you get on. Walking is fine, but see how far you can run for, and how much you enjoy it.

Remind yourself that this is how you’re going to be spending a significant chunk of your free time when marathon training - so see how you like it.

It’s important to recognise your base fitness level (see WHAT’S YOUR CURRENT PHYSICAL CONDITION?) and to be realistic. Before you commit to a marathon, you want to know that you are physically and mentally capable of getting into ‘marathon condition’ before starting.

If in any doubts, go and speak to your doctor before starting any kind of training regime.

DESIGN A TRAINING PLAN

You’ve got the running shoes, you’ve been for a short run and you’ve told yourself ‘OK, I’m going for this’.

The next step is to devise a complete training plan which covers the entire period from right now until the day of your marathon.

Having a properly-prepared training plan in place takes all of the decision-making out of your hands when you’re in the middle of training. It also prevents you from deviating too much from the tried-and-tested plan, and can help motivate you.

We’ve provided example training plans and a bunch of tips on how to design your own plan later in this eBook – see DESIGN A TRAINING PLAN.
MOTIVATION TIPS

At times, one of the toughest parts of marathon training is actually finding the motivation to get out and train. It can be hard to get yourself out of this rut when you get fed up of the routine.

So how do you find a new source of internal motivation? Let’s explore…

DESIGN YOUR TRAINING PLAN

OK so you’ve signed up for your event, and your enthusiasm is sky high at the moment. Now is the time to lock down a training schedule – sit down and think about what is going to be required over the next few months in terms of commitment, and draw out a training plan.

Channel some of that enthusiasm onto paper, and then you’ve removed the ‘decision fatigue’ element from your training period – rather than waking up and deciding if you are going to train that day, and what you are going to do, you’ve already got it all laid out on your own customised training plan.

See our Training Plan advice and examples on page 29.

TELL YOUR FRIENDS ABOUT YOUR MARATHON

There’s a lot written about whether it is actually a good idea to tell people when you set yourself a new goal – some feel that by sharing a goal before you’ve actually achieved it, you gain some of the ‘feel-good’ factor associated with completing the goal, and this makes you less inclined to really finish.

However, when it comes to running-related goals and working towards completing an event, telling everyone and anyone who will listen can work
well – make sure the people around you are aware you’re training for something new and ambitious.

This puts a small, but hopefully not-too-uncomfortable, amount of social pressure on you to stick to your training plan and follow through with the event. Posting on social media and setting up a charity fund-raising page are other tools you can use to share your goal with others. Friends will start to ask you how your training went at the weekend, or comment on how you look fitter – all of which feeds back and motivates you to keep on-task.

**JUST PUT ON YOUR SOCKS**

On the cold, stormy winter evenings when your inner sloth is trying to convince you why you should stay inside as opposed to going out for a run, consider this.

Instead of telling yourself you’re definitely going for a run, just take the first tiny step in the routine of ‘going for a run.’ This means going to the drawer and getting your running socks. Put them on.

Nothing has happened. You aren’t cold, or uncomfortable. You’re still inside and cosy.

Now your socks are on, why not put on your running shorts? And now you’ve got the shorts on, time for the running shirt.

Before you know it, you’ve walked your body through the routine of preparing to run, and it’s now ready for the next step – to put on your running shoes and head out the door!

‘Tricking’ your body into going running by doing the first tiny steps in a routine is one of the classic motivational moves runners make on those tough days where you’d rather stay inside.
USE RUNNING AS A REASON TO TRAVEL

Many distance runners note this as the single best thing about having running as part of their lifestyle – they get to use a race as a good excuse to visit someplace new or exotic.

Running a marathon in a new country gives you a different perspective – you will likely see the country from a different angle than if you visited it on a touring holiday, and you’ll instantly have a good story and a reason to interact with the locals. It’s also a fantastic way to get a break away with friends.

And it’s easier to justify a long weekend in New York, or a week in the Caribbean, say, if you are going to be taking part in a running race while you’re there. Use it as an excuse to see all those places you’ve looked at on the map, but never had quite a good enough reason to visit – until now.

RUNNING MOTIVATION – WATCH AS NEW HABITS DEVELOP

In the bestseller ‘The Power Of Habit’, Charles Duhigg explains how changing your habits vastly influences your lifestyle and wellbeing. An external goal such as a running event six months away gives you all the reasons you need to make small but significant changes to your lifestyle, which can have compound effects on the rest of your life.

For example, as part of your training, you might decide to do one good hour of exercise (running or cross-training) every day. Not only does this serve as excellent preparation for your event, but this establishes a new habit in your lifestyle that has far reaching effects – the regular exercise will make you fitter, happier (thanks, endorphins) and maybe lose some excess weight.

And the opportunity-cost of an hour’s worth of exercise is almost always positive – in other words, what else would you have done with that hour? Sat at a desk? The feel-good buzz left over after your exercise will carry through the rest of your day too.
TRAINING
This is the most important chapter in this eBook – it explains how to get from your current fitness level to ‘race ready’ in the most effective and efficient way possible.

The sections that follow will show you how to design an effective training programme based on the amount of work you need to apply in order to reach your marathon goals.

There are three broad inputs required here – your current condition, or running ability, your desired race day condition and the amount of time between now and the marathon.

**MINIMUM TRAINING TIME?**

Many people ask what the minimum time you need to prepare to run a marathon is…for someone at a reasonable fitness level, who can already run for one hour continuously, it’s perfectly possible to be marathon-ready within 3 months.

Typically, it is prudent to allow around 6 months to train for a marathon – this allows a more gradual ramp-up of your mileage, will decrease the chance of injury – and also give you some time to bounce back from any other injuries.
WHAT’S YOUR CURRENT PHYSICAL CONDITION?

This is the first piece of information that needs to be established. Where are you right now, in terms of physical preparation? Wherever you are, this becomes your ‘base line’ to build from, and to design your training plan around.

Some questions to get you thinking about your current level of readiness:

- How far can you continuously run right now at a conversational pace (holding a conversation while running)?

- How regularly do you currently do cardiovascular activity, and for how long?

- When you go for a run, what is your default pace – the speed you naturally run at when not pushing too hard?

SETTING YOUR MARATHON GOALS

The next step is to consider what you want to achieve in the marathon. This means considering whether you just want to finish, or whether you have a specific finishing time in mind.

In any case, the most important thing is to be realistic.

If this is your first-ever marathon and you’ve never ran close to 42.2km before, then you have to acknowledge that simply finishing is an incredible achievement that you should be pleased with.
CONSISTENT PACE = KEY TO SUCCESS

If you are working towards a specific finishing time, then the key to achieving this is a consistent pace throughout, meaning you run at the same speed throughout the entire race.

This is a lesson that has been learned by experienced marathoners countless times – the key to successfully and comfortably completing a marathon is choosing a consistent pace and sticking to it.

If, towards the end of your race, you find that you’ve got plenty of energy left in the tank then you can speed up – but it’s much wiser to do this at the end of a race, rather than at the start.

The table on the following page shows marathon finishing times against the pace required to achieve it. Running pace is typically measured in ‘minutes per kilometre’ or ‘minutes per mile’ – if you have a pace you are targeting, it is suggested you buy a GPS watch that gives you real-time pace, in order that you can train at specific paces, and then use it during your marathon to ensure you reach your desired finishing time.
ENJOYMENT IS A LEGITIMATE GOAL

Before choosing an ambitious pace from the table above, getting your head down and working towards it with a relentless training regime, consider this – simply being able to enjoy your marathon is a legitimate goal.

You are going to be out running the race (and the hundreds of kilometres of training beforehand) for several hours, and while some discomfort is mandatory, the amount of pain you experience is largely determined by you – it’s a factor of how prepared you are, and how much you push yourself.

So while you may have a desire to conquer a specific finishing time, you should ask yourself if it's really achievable – and if it is, are you willing to spend a few hours pushing your body to it's limit?
Typically, marathon runners who chase fast times enjoy the first 10-20km or so of the race, when their training and their adrenaline carries them through – then the rest of the marathon is a constant, uncomfortable battle to push your body to its limit.

While it’s fantastic to set new goals and explore your own physical limits, a legitimate question to ask is – **how much am I going to enjoy this?** What if you dialled back a bit and added an extra 15 – 20 minutes to your target finishing time? What if you didn’t have a strict finishing time in mind, but just run at a comfortable pace and try and soak in the day?

**JOINING THE SUB-4HR CLUB**

As an editorial aside, we wanted to acknowledge the arbitrary benchmark that is the 4hr finishing mark.

Where has it come from?

It just so happens that 4 hours is roughly the time it takes for an amateur runner with plenty of training to complete the marathon.

It is easy to put too much importance on trying to beat this imaginary yardstick – however it can act as a good motivator during your training.

If your aim is to complete the marathon in under 4 hours, then the advice is simple (and the same as any other pacing advice) – run at a consistent pace that will get you in comfortably under 4hrs.

If all you want to do is finish in under 4 hrs, there’s no point setting off at a 3hr marathon pace, only for your legs to give in later when you inevitably ‘hit the wall’ – just train for, and run, a slightly-faster-than 4hr marathon, i.e. 5 min 30secs per kilometre (you may wish to build in 5-10 minutes of ‘fat’ in your pace, just in case you do hit the wall).
HOW LONG UNTIL THE MARATHON?

The final piece of information required to draw up your training schedule is the amount of time between starting your training and the marathon.

If you don’t have a specific marathon in mind, then we recommend looking for one that is at least 6 months away, preferably 9 – 12 months.

It is possible to be marathon-ready in a minimum of 3 months, assuming you have a good level of underlying fitness.

The less time you have to prepare, the more intensely you will have to ramp up your mileage in your training runs. Ramping up mileage too quickly inevitably leads to injuries, so plan wisely.

Bear in mind that the final month of your training needs to be set aside for tapering when thinking about how long you have to prepare.

If you are signing up for a marathon with short notice (less that 6 months to prepare) then you may wish to re-evaluate your goals. If you feel that you may not have time to prepare as much as you’d like, then perhaps your goal should just be to complete the marathon, rather than finish it in a spectacular time.

CLEAR GOALS

Alright, so you’ve taken stock of where you currently are, and where you want to be come race day? Great.

Once you have settled on your marathon goals, all that is left is the preparation – i.e. the hard work. Setting clear goals may seem like a tiny, almost irrelevant step – but the truth is it gives you’re whole training period structure and will help motivate you. Having clear goals eliminates mental fatigue or unnecessary worry about if you’re focussing on the right areas. Instead, all you have to do is design your training plan and then show up, every single day, between now and the marathon.
TYPES OF TRAINING

Let’s look at the different exercises, routines and workouts that will constitute your ‘marathon training’ – these will be the building blocks of your training plan.

We’ve split the different types of training into two categories:

- **Run Training.** Any type of training that involves putting one foot in front of the other.

- **Cross Training.** This is any kind of exercise that supports your running, without actually being running – whether it’s stretching, swimming, yoga, etc.

RUN TRAINING

‘Going for a run’ is a great way to train for a marathon – however, in order to optimise your training and make best use of your time, each run should have a purpose and form that in some way contributes to your plan. Here are the different broad categories your runs can fall into:

‘CLASSIC’ RUN

This is your regular, typical run, done at a comfortable, conversational pace which would be a little slower than your target marathon pace. Depending on your goals, these should be 5 – 15km in length and you should be doing 2 – 3 of these per week – as many as you can fit in and still comfortably recover after each one.
LONG RUNS

These are a staple of marathon training and are typically done once a week, at weekends. These long runs are your opportunity to increase your mileage as the marathon draws near, and are done at a slow, comfortable pace. The goal with long runs is to get your body used to the long hours and miles on your feet – so they are ready to tackle the 42.2km on race day.

INTERVAL TRAINING

In an Interval Run, you run for a set distance, at a set pace, then jog/walk for a set distance, and repeat. It’s typical to run for 500-800m, at marathon pace, then jog/walk for 300-400m. For the plans that follow, we are working on running 800m at marathon pace, then jog/walking for 400m, and repeating this x 8-10.

TEMPO RUNS

These are shorter runs (around 45 mins) that start easy then gradually build in speed until you are running at your best ‘10km’ pace – this is faster than your marathon pace - before dropping off to finish with an easy 5-10 minutes.

RACES

A common question is ‘should I do other races in preparation for my marathon?’ Although you don’t want to over-do it, or interrupt your training schedule too much with other running commitments. However, if there happens to be races in your area which roughly map on to the distances you had planned on your training programme, then go for it! Of particular use can be a half-marathon, 4-8 weeks before your marathon, to help gauge your pace, get you used to racing and compliment your training.
CROSS TRAINING

Cross training is any kind of non-running workout that compliments your marathon training.

Unfortunately, cross training can be the first item to be dismissed from your training plan when real life gets in the way and you realise you don’t have all the time in the world to prepare for your race – and you want to spend all your available time out running!

The truth is that cross training is not mandatory – many successful marathon runners do well with absolutely zero cross training. The benefits of cross training however – injury prevention, retaining flexibility, giving your body recovery time – are positive enough that it comes highly recommended if you can find the time.

While preparing for your marathon, you don’t want to do any sports or activities that could cause injury or negatively affect your performance – so contact sports should be out. Running also pulls your body in a different direction from many physical sports – running can limit your flexibility, and the amount of cardio you do in your training will invariably lead to weight loss – so marathon training does not compliment your Brazilian Jujitsu classes, I'm afraid.

Likewise, it’s probably not wise to introduce totally new forms of exercise to your body just in the name of cross-training. If you’ve never lifted a dumb-bell in your life, the weeks prior to your first marathon are probably not the optimal time to start.

Even if you choose not to incorporate any cross-training into your training plan, you may wish to schedule a few sessions as your marathon approaches and you are winding down your run training – this’ll help to keep your body agile and ready for race day.

Here are some popular forms of cross training, and how they can compliment your marathon training:
SWIMMING

Swimming is a great minimal-impact cardio activity that you can do as cross-training, or even sneak in a few easy laps on your rest days. The gentle pressure of the water give your muscles a mini-massage, and being in the pool lets you fully stretch out in ways you otherwise can’t. It’s a great way to ‘reset’ a fatigued body, while giving a cardio workout at the same time. Depending on your ability, we’d recommend 30-60 minutes of pool time once a week as cross training.

YOGA / PILATES

Yoga and pilates (and other stretching / aerobic classes) are a great counter-weight to the repetitive, linear strain your body encounters during distance running. They can also help tone and conserve the parts of your body that are neglected during your runs.

GYM / BODYWEIGHT EXERCISES

A seasoned runner can turn themselves into an injury-proof, all-round athletic machine by dedicating a few work-outs per week to the gym. Most running injuries occur due to weaknesses, mis-alignments and imbalances – the easiest way to mitigate against these is strength training.

Spending just one hour per week on a ‘leg day’, focussing on glutes and hamstrings will do your lower body the world of good. You can even do your ‘leg day’ at home with free-standing squats and lunges.

The problem is factoring a ‘leg day’ into your marathon training plan – leg days leave your legs stiff, tired and in need of some recovery time. So while you’re deep into your marathon training, keep the weights low and the reps at a comfortable number, so your leg muscles get a workout to help condition them without pushing them to fatigue.

And why stop at legs once you’re in the gym? The core, back, chest, shoulders, arms – all of these are used when running, so why not
strengthen them up too? The upper body strength improves your overall form and technique, making it easier to keep running those last few miles on those long days.

Even a simple body-weight circuit of press-up variations, pull-ups, free standing squats and dips can give your upper body a comprehensive workout.
TRAINING PLANS
A solid training plan is your key to marathon success, plain and simple.

By first setting your goals and then designing a training plan to suit those goals, you lay out a roadmap to success – then all you have to do is follow the roadmap.

In this section, we’ll give you the tools and advice required to build your own training plan – and share our own exclusive, customisable Excel-based training plans for you to follow and adapt to your own requirements.

### FREE, DOWNLOADABLE TRAINING PLANS

Follow this link to access all our free, customisable training plans:

[http://www.marathonhandbook.com/trainingplans](http://www.marathonhandbook.com/trainingplans)

(These can also be found in the Appendix of this book)

### HOW TO START?

The easiest way to build your training plan is to use a spreadsheet (start your own, or download one of ours from the link above).

Create a table with one column for each day of the week, and a row for each week.

Here’s how it should look to start:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE MAIN ELEMENTS

Now you can begin to populate your training plan with the various types of training we covered in TYPES OF TRAINING (page 24).

The priority should always be to ensure you are getting enough running miles in, then you can plot your cross training and rest days in-between them.

Here’s some points to consider for each one:

THE ‘CLASSIC’ RUN

Your standard run of 5 – 12km, done at slightly slower than marathon pace. Depending on your goals, you should be looking to include at least two of these per week. They are typically done through the week – to allow for a long run at the weekend - and ideally not on consecutive days.

THE LONG RUN

Your longer, slower runs where you increase your mileage and time on your feet. Most people schedule these in for the weekend, simply because we’re all busy through the week, and spending 3+ hours running is not feasible between Monday and Friday!

INTERVAL TRAINING / TEMPO RUNS

Interval training and tempo runs are really good for working on your pace and stamina – they are a great compliment to the ‘classic’ run if you have specific time targets for your marathon. Having said that, many marathoners (especially first-timers) train and comfortably complete their events with no interval or tempo training. So depending on your goals, you
may wish to incorporate one or two of these per week into your training schedule.

**CROSS TRAINING**

Typically, cross training is performed not more than twice per week, simply because after running so much you won’t have too much time to dedicate to cross training, while also allowing your body to rest! Therefore, schedule cross training for in-between running days, when you are confident.

**REST DAYS**

Giving your body the time to recuperate is super important – it wards off any potential injuries, allows your muscles to relax and for you to mentally take a day off from your training too. You should take at least one rest day (a day of zero marathon-based activity) per week – and a great day to do it is after your long run.

The amount of rest days you need depends on your underlying fitness level – if you’re already doing some form of exercise 7 days a week, then you probably just need one day to recuperate after working your legs so hard.

If however, like most of us, your marathon training plan represents a big step-up in the amount of physical activity you usually do, then your body needs time to adjust. In this case, taking two rest days per week is totally acceptable.

Taking more than two rest days per week is fine if you’re feeling really tired, but you are beginning to eat into your marathon preparation – so we really recommend not taking more than two. If your legs are too tired or sore to train one day, then perhaps look at doing cross-training such as swimming or gym work rather than just skipping your workout entirely.

Keeping yourself disciplined is key to marathon success, and if you start to deviate from your training plan then it can be a slippery slope that leads to you being unfit to complete your marathon comfortably.
PLANNING YOUR TRAINING
PACE AND MILEAGE

Your detailed training plan will include the pace and mileage of every training run – so how do you determine this?

Remember that your training should peak four weeks prior to your marathon, and after that peak you simply taper back – so you have to build this taper into your training plan.

Your initial training regime should be challenging yet achievable. At this point you should already have a fair idea of how comfortable you are when running, and how many runs per week your body can handle. The last thing you want is to set an overly-ambitious training regime and then never even get started.

Refer to our example training plans (www.marathonhandbook.com/trainingplans) to gauge how best to start if you’re unsure – we recommend starting with a minimum of three runs per week (two ‘classic’ runs and one long run), and introducing a fourth run as your training progresses.
INCREMENTAL MILEAGE INCREASES

As your training progresses, you’ll gradually build up your mileage every week. For example, for a first-time marathoner, at the start of your training you’ll be running 25-30km week.

By the time your training peaks, you want to be putting away at least 60km / week. Like everything else in your training plan, this increase should be a linear, gradual approach.

There’s a rule of thumb called the ‘10% Rule’ – this dictates that you shouldn’t increase your mileage by more than 10% each week, in order to avoid injuries, fatigue and strain.

Like all ‘rules of thumb’, this one is rather flexible, and has a few caveats – but holds as a pretty good quick-check.

The main caveat to the 10% Rule is if you are starting at low distances. If you run 10km one week, then following the rule of thumb means you will run 11km the following week, and 12.1km the week after . . . in which case you should maybe be considering tackling a 10km race or half-marathon rather than a full.

PEAK MILEAGE

What should be your peak mileage during training?

Depends.

For a first time marathoner, your body is not used to going so far and so hard for so long. The longer your runs, the more glycogen depletion your muscles will suffer – when they bottom out, continuing to run takes a lot more physical and mental effort – this is what is referred to as ‘hitting the
One of the problems with hitting the wall is that pushing through it severely fatigues your body and can lead to stresses and injuries, and extend your recovery time.

For that reason, for first-time marathoners in training it’s recommended to run up to the wall, but not to hit it. This means capping your training runs at around the 33km (20 mile) mark, when your legs are beginning to tire, but you’re (hopefully) not pushing through the ‘wall’ yet.

For seasoned distance runners, this upper mileage limit is less important – their bodies are more conditioned to running for long distances, so their muscles have adapted and don’t burn through their glycogen stores so rapidly.

**MARATHON READY IN 3 MONTHS? REALLY?**

Although 3 months may seem like an ambitious timetable, it’s perfectly achievable, based on the following assumptions:

- You have the base fitness to currently run 30km / week without being overly fatigued.
- You can avoid injury.
- You have a suitable training plan and follow it rigorously.

If you can already put away 30km in a week, then applying the 10% Rule means that within 8 weeks you will be running 60km / week. This is sufficient, though fairly minimal, for marathon preparation. You then have 4 more weeks to taper.

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(These can also be found in the Appendix of this book)
SETTING THE PACE

You should by now have your marathon pace in mind – the speed at which you’re going to run, on the day.

Most of your training will be done at a **slower than marathon pace**. This is to avoid injury and fatigue, and because training is all preparation for the main event – you don’t necessarily have to train with the same mileage / pace of the actual marathon in order to get round it.

Your standard, ‘classic’ run done 2-3 times per week should be done at roughly marathon pace, or a little slower. If you can’t sustain this pace yet on a 10km run, you want to be able to reach it at least 8 weeks before the marathon – so you can train at this pace for a month, before tapering begins. If you are not at this pace yet, plot a **gradual** pace increase into your training plan.

So if you want to run a sub-4hr marathon, for example, your marathon pace would be slightly under 05:41min / km. For your ‘classic’ runs, you would look to run at 05:41 – 06:15 min / km, in order to get your body used to maintaining that type of speed.

For your long runs, the goal is really to get your body used to the mileage and spending time on your feet, so pace is secondary. As a rough guide, you can add a full minute per kilometre to your marathon pace and you should feel comfortable bashing out many kilometres at this rate.
THE ART OF TAPERING

First off, why taper?

U.S. mountain-running champion Nicole Hunt sums it up as follows:

Tapering helps “bolster muscle power, increase muscle glycogen, muscle repair, freshen the mind, fine-tune the neural network so that it’s working the most efficiently, and most importantly, eliminate the risk of overtraining where it could slow the athlete down the most . . . studies have indicated that a taper can help runners improve by 6 to 20%”

The length of your taper depends on your underlying athletic ability, and the amount of training you typically do. If you have been running half-marathons every weekend for years, then there’s little need to taper for more than a few days prior to the race. If, however, this is your first marathon and you’ve really stretched the limits of your body during tapering, 3-4 weeks is recommended to get your body into peak race-day condition.

TAPERING CHECKLIST:

- Mileage. Each week of your taper you should decrease your weekly mileage by 20-35%.

- Pace. Your fastest training run is now behind you. During your taper, you can do one run per week (8-10km) at marathon pace. The rest of your runs should be at gradually decreasing intensity and pace.

- Long Run. These should decrease in length significantly – if you peaked at a 20 miles, then your next long run should be 12 to 14 miles, then 10 – 12 miles, then an 8 miler a week before the marathon.

- Speed workouts. No need for tempo training or interval runs while you are tapering for your first marathon. In these final few weeks, your race day potential is already locked in – anything you do now to try and increase your athletic abilities will likely work against you on marathon day.
- Conditions. Avoid steep hills, rough terrain or anything unnecessarily challenging that could lead to injury.

For more details on physical, mental and logistical preparation four weeks before your race, check out the section FOUR WEEKS BEFORE THE MARATHON on page 62.
SHOES & GEAR
CHOOSING RUNNING SHOES

The most important piece of gear in any race – running shoes!

The simple answer to ‘which shoes should I wear for my marathon’ is whatever shoes you feel comfortable running long distances in.

If you already have a pair of shoes that you find comfortable running in and have confidence they’ll last for the whole marathon, stick with them.

However, sometimes everybody needs some guidance, and if you haven’t found a pair of shoes that you feel is right for you yet then we’ve got some pointers for what to look out for. Marathons do funny things to your feet, and the shoes that you feel comfortable running in for a 10k may not hold up after 42km of pounding.

Here’s our guide of what to look for when choosing appropriate shoes for your marathon:

CUSHIONING AND SUPPORT

When you start pushing your body to run long distances, it’s common to lose some of that gazelle-like grace you feel at the start of a run.

Your feet get heavy, your legs are tired and you’re digging deeper to push your body onwards. This means your form gets sloppy, and you’re probably not so light on your feet as you want to be.

For this reason, almost every marathon runner runs with a shoe with some kind of cushioning.

If you’re looking to progress from a middle-distance runner to a long-distance runner, getting some shoes with additional cushioning is not a bad idea – at least for your long runs.
TRY, TRY AND TRY

The one way to truly know that a shoe works for you is to go and run with it. Unfortunately, most stores don’t give refunds if you come back after putting 30km into a shoe! Some tips for trying and buying running shoes in a shop:

- First and foremost, go to a running store that has knowledgeable staff, if possible.

- If they are offering some running analysis, then go for it!

- Don’t assume you know your size – every brand varies slightly.

- Look for a snug heel – not too tight but one that cups your foot nicely.

- Instep – should feel like it compliments the shape of your foot, providing support and comfort.

- Width – if you feel it at all tight while in the store, it’ll just get worse later. Make sure the laces aren’t too tight before you give up on a pair of shoes though.

- Length – you want to be able to wiggle your toes freely up and down. Also, feet can swell during a race, so you need some extra room. Later on in this section we discuss whether you should think about buying larger shoes.

- Overall feel. Get up and walk around, if the shop has some gradient stands go and see how the feet move inside the shoes when going up and down hills.

- Grip – if you’re just going road running, you don’t need the studded, rugged model – match the shoe to the application and terrain.
BREAKING IN RUNNING SHOES, AND SHOE LIFE

‘Breaking in’ a new pair of shoes is not only to get your feet acclimatized to the new shoes, but to get the shoes used to being run in – and to make sure they’re dependable.

It’s never recommended to run a marathon in a brand new pair of shoes, even if you’re just replacing an old model – your old ones will have worn and fatigued a bit, and your feet will be used to this. Also, new shoes can change shape slightly in the first few hours of wearing.

If you can put in three or four runs, or around 50km, into a shoe before an event then you’ll be golden.

Likewise, shoes do have a limited life – this is typically anywhere after the 300 mile mark, when the soles become so worn that it affects your running gait, and the cushioning starts to lose it’s springy-ness and support. A good rule of thumb is to change out your shoes every few months, and every 300 miles is a good benchmark. Many runners will run an old pair of shoes to death before changing them out – that’s fine, as long as the old shoes aren’t causing any issues. If you start to develop a nagging injury and your shoes are getting a bit worn, look to change them out.

GOING A SIZE BIGGER

This is a common piece of advice when it comes to distance running – buy your shoes a size or so bigger, because your feet swell during the race. While it’s true that your feet will swell, you don’t want to be starting the race in a pair of clumpy clown shoes.

Some people advise on going up to two sizes bigger than your regular shoe. However, what is important to remember is that if you are already an experienced runner, your feet will already have adapted and will be a bit longer than they would be if you were a couch potato – so will change less over the course of the race. It’s typical that
your feet will grow larger in the first 3-6 months of serious run training, but after that they tend to grow less – though everyone is different.

We find that erring on the larger size works, but adding a full shoe size is usually more than enough (1/2 size is more like it) and as always, train in the shoes you plan to run the race with!

**GOING MINIMALIST**

Minimalist shoes are shows with very little cushioning (such as Vibram Five-Fingers, Nike Frees) intended to mimic the act of running barefoot.

The wave of barefoot running has brought a few ‘minimalists’ to tackle long distances, but you really need to be an ‘all-in’ barefoot runner to complete an ultra without any issues!

We’re not saying it can’t be done - we’ve seen runners complete 250km races in paper thin sandals with smiles on their faces the whole way – but these are guys who trained extensively in these slippers, running several marathons a week already.

The key to running far in minimalist shoes is a slow transition period and a very gradual increase in mileage – the lack of cushioning really does make things a lot harder when you’re starting to run on empty.

A few minimalist runners have built themselves up successfully run for shorter distances without issues, then went for a longer event – and suffered. The repeated pounding of un-cushioned feet on the trail leaves their soles tender and aching.

Again – we’re not advising against going minimalist, we’re just forewarning that it can become an extra disadvantage when you’re already pushing yourself to the limit!
GOING MAXIMALIST

After the tide of barefoot-style shoes reached its high water mark and began to ebb back, ‘maximalist’ shoes have become amazingly popular – especially amongst distance runners. These are basically shoes with a very thick sole. Brands such as Hoka One One, Altra and Newtons are leading the charge with the inch-thick rubber sole philosophy.

The additional cushioning provided gives a softer and more forgiving run, which can make a difference as you clock the miles and your body gets tired.

So why don’t all marathon runners convert to Maximalist shoes full-time? Well, for one, the scientific community hasn’t really found anything conclusive regarding the effects of running in maximalist shoes – yet. Just like the Minimalist movement, the Maximalist movement blows open a whole new field of study, rather than providing a catch-all solution to a problem.

It’s fair to say that running with an extremely cushioned shoe will alter your footfall and gait substantially – and as always, every runner has a different body, and the effects of changing a style will be different. Some people feel Maximalist shoes promote poor running form if you haven’t already developed the leg muscles and muscle memory required for running long distances.

Many runners will typically use maximalist shoes for only 30% of their training runs – in order to get used to them – and then use them on distance events.

If you decide to go maximalist, the old mantra applies – get plenty of practice in them before you turn up at the start line!
WHAT SHOES DOES EVERYONE ELSE WEAR?

If you’re truly lost, a fine place to start is looking at other runners. Ask your friends what works for them on long runs, or see what’s popular at other races.

There are dozens of brands out there churning out quality shoes for long distance runs these days, and it would be impossible to mention them all – but there are a few brands that have unwavering popularity.

**Asics**, especially the Nimbus line, prove to be a perennial favourite for part-time runners and people starting out. They provide good cushioning and support and have a decent build.

For the more seasoned runner, **Salomon** shoes have become the ‘go-to’ for many seasoned distance runners – their trail running models such as the **Speedcross** have got a great build and a good reputation. **Hoka One Ones**, and other maximalist styles, have also taken over a huge section of the market and are probably a close second in popularity to Salomon. Inov-8, New Balance, Saucony, and many more are always visible at the start line of any good race.

But **don’t feel obliged to go with the herd** if you already have a pair of shoes you’re comfortable with! There are plenty of runners who nail distance runs in their off-the-shelf discount store brand!
RUNNING SOCKS

Socks are easily overlooked, but we consider them the second most important piece of kit to get right, after your shoes. Poor sock choice can lead to all kinds of terrible foot conditions. Here’s what to check for when choosing socks:

AVOIDING BLISTERS

Blisters need three things to propagate – heat, friction and moisture. You can minimise moisture by using socks designed to ‘wick’ away sweat, and you can avoid friction by buying socks that fit your feet well, stopping them from folding or clumping up then rubbing. Another tip for avoiding friction is to coat the blister-prone part of your feet with a lubricant like Bodyglide. Vaseline does work too, but tends to stick in gooey clumps that can attract dirt and sand.

TOE SOCKS

Toe socks (such as Injinji’s) have become increasingly popular in ultra-running circles – they’re the socks that are kinda like gloves, with a separate little section for each of your toes. By isolating each individual toe, they eliminate the risk of toes rubbing together and creating blisters in that region.

COMPRESSION

Socks with compression sections built in are also becoming popular. These snug sections can help reduce discomfort and swelling . . . if they work for you, go for it!
DOUBLE LAYERS

Double-layered socks can reduce friction, thereby reducing the chances of blisters – but properly prepared feet should do this anyway. Double layered socks are obviously thicker than regular socks, which some people dislike.

DRESS REHEARSAL

Don’t take new, un-tested socks to a race. Always try them out somewhere first. You never know when a differently-placed seam will start to irritate your skin after a few kilometres.
RUNNING SHIRTS

By-and-large you shouldn’t have to over-analyse your running shirt choice - but as always we like to look at all the factors that can play a part in selecting gear. Here are our key points when selecting a shirt for your event:

RUNNING SHIRT MATERIAL

You need something that is moisture-wicking (draws sweat away from your body) and quick-drying. Polyester and nylon are in, cotton is out. Merino wool can be great too for cooler events.

(The one drawback with polyester is that it absorbs sweat and is quite stubborn about it, so shirts you use regularly may start to have a little bit of a ‘scent’ to them. So next time your wardrobe smells a bit, don’t blame your washing machine.)

SUN PROTECTION

We recommend finding a shirt with a UPF rating when you’re going running in the exposed sunlight, be it the desert or the mountains. Pick your UPF rating to suit the conditions.

NON-CHAFING SEAMS

If you’re buying a shirt from a reputable running company, these shouldn’t be an issue. Always do your dress rehearsal before a big run though, regardless who made your shirt – the last thing you want is uncomfortable rubbing ruining your big day.
SLEEVE LENGTH

Long-sleeved shirts can provide extra protection from the sun on warm days, or can keep you warm on colder days, so take this into consideration and gauge the conditions you’re likely to experience on your run.

THICKNESS

In cold weather you may choose to run with two layers, or find a shirt with an inner liner than helps wick away sweat. If running in warm or hot conditions, then go for an ultra-light shirt - any extra thickness is just going to heat you up and add weight.

COMPRESSION SHIRTS

Despite their popularity, most people can’t actually quantify exactly what it is that the compression gear does to potentially enhance either performance or recovery.

Some online articles will tell you compression wear has no effect on performance while running – others say that when compression is used correctly, it can improve venous return and help oxygenate working muscles. However, in the case of distance running, this so far seems to have only a very slight increase in performance (1 – 2%). So we wouldn’t recommend shelling out your cash for compression clothing if you just want to run that little bit faster.

Some people like the feel of compression wear while running – if you’re one of these people, then go for it! Minor secondary benefits to running with compression wear is that it can keep you warmer, and reduce chafing (but hopefully you’ve already eliminated the possibility of chafing using other methods).
COLOUR

Lighter colours absorb less heat from the sun, so white is never a bad idea. Lighter colours are also more visible at night-time, which may be worth bearing in mind. Same goes for shirts with reflective strips.

ACCESSORY POCKETS

There are a few shirts on the market with pockets built in at various places, usually around the lower back, for stashing your gels / salts / keys in. These can be useful in runs where you're lacking storage space and don't want to take a big pack. As always, train with the shirt beforehand and make sure the pocket load doesn't bounce around, chafe, or rub.
RUNNING SHORTS

Here’s what to consider when selecting running shorts:

MATERIAL

You need something that is moisture-wicking (draws sweat away from your body) and quick-drying. Like shirts, polyester and nylon are good options.

POCKETS

If you can get a pair of shorts with a small zip-pocket (preferably right at the back), then go for it. The additional weight and cost of getting the pocket is worth it for being able to easily store and access a couple of gels, salts, iPods, etc. on runs when you don’t take a pack.

COMPRESSION SHORTS

As mentioned in our shirts section, the effectiveness of compression gear seems to depend on who is wearing it. Many people enjoy the ‘lightly massaging’ feeling of wearing compression shorts, and feel it aides with muscle recovery.

Minor secondary benefits to running with compression wear is that it can keep you warmer, and reduce chafing (but hopefully you’ve already eliminated the possibility of chafing using other methods).
LINER AND SEAMS

This exists so you don’t have to wear underwear, thus preventing chafing. However when running long distances we still like to apply a lubricant, like Bodyglide, down there. If you’re buying shorts from a reputable running company, chafing seams shouldn’t be an issue. Always do your dress rehearsal before a big run though, regardless who made your shorts.

LENGTH

We’d never suggest you commit sins against decency while running a race, but shorter shorts can make a difference – especially in heat. The longer the shorts, the more heat and moisture will hang around your nether regions, which can lead to discomfort, chafing and rashes.
HATS

Running with a hat can be a preference, but most runners will throw one on to keep the sun off their face and out of their eyes, and their hair in one place.

If the sun is going to be out, take a hat. If you’re out for a few hours, that’s a lot of sun exposure. Covering your head and face can keep you shaded and psychologically keep that “I’m getting baked here” feeling away.

For long events, we recommend hats that give total coverage! If you’re running in the mid-day sun, a baseball cap can’t cover your face and your entire neck! We’ve watched enough people constantly rotate their baseball cap lid to know they’re not good enough when the sun’s out.

There’s a few choices for total coverage, (depending on how self-conscious you are). The legionnaire’s hat is awesome but can get you some funny looks if you’re somewhere more populated than the Sahara.

A soft, wide-brimmed hat with a neck-string works very well – and can even be filled with water and dunked over your head at aid stations.

Hats can help absorb some sweat, but we recommend taking a buff / necktie to efficiently wipe away your sweat from your head.
SUNGLASSES

Running-specific sunglasses can cost over $200, if you are taking things too seriously. We’re here to tell you shouldn’t have to spend as much as $50 on a new pair – in fact, you’ve probably got a pair floating around the house that are sufficient. It’s nice to have a pair of ‘sports’ sunglasses, but your old Aviators or Oakleys may well do the trick if you’re cash-strapped. Things to look for:

UV PROTECTION

UVA and UVB protection should be baseline requirement when shopping for new shades.

COMFORTABLE WHEN RUNNING

Can you wear them during a long run without them bouncing about or causing discomfort? Then they’re fine!

WEIGHT

There is a near-negligible difference between a pair of ultra-light sports shades and your buddy’s new Ray-ban Wayfarers, so don’t let this play a factor when the salesperson is giving his sales pitch.

GETTING TECHNICAL

Other things that you might look for on a pair of sports sunglasses, but are ‘nice to haves’ – shatter-resistant material, interchangeable lenses, anti-fog lenses, vented sides, polarised lenses . . but don’t get too hung up on them.
NUTRITION AND HYDRATION
**NUTRITION + FUELLING**

The reason you might eat while you run is to convert food into energy to fuel you – therefore, you want to select foods that:

i) Can quickly and easily be digested and turned into energy

ii) Have a high calorie content – calorific value is a direct measurement of energy in food

iii) Assuming you are carrying this food, you want it to be lightweight, or have the highest calorie to weight ratio possible.

iv) Be edible in the conditions you are running in – if you’re going for a race in a hot climate, you want something you can still stomach after 4 hrs in 40°C heat!

**FUELLING STRATEGY**

Developing a good fuelling strategy – or planning what to eat, and how often – is key to your performance in a distance running event.

The first thing to note is that everyone is different – people have different tastes, digestive abilities and preferences. Some runners will fuel a run with a high-sugar gel every 40 minutes without missing a beat, others will go all day on the banana they chomped down at the start line. Experimenting during training and finding what suits you is essential.

Eating when running is hard. Especially when you’ve been running far, and when it’s hot outside – suddenly, that Clif bar is like a leaden block in your hand, and no amount of chewing is going to make it go down.

We generally recommend having some type of fuel every hour – be it a gel or a handful of nuts.
Experienced runners survive on one gel every 30-40 minutes for the duration of the event, while many other distance runners will only eat very 3-4 hours on the trail, or when they feel hungry.

Having a strategy and sticking to it is important – this way you will be constantly fuelling your body at the rate you are comfortable with. Going off-script halfway through a rural race is never a good idea!

**GELS**

These syrupy sweet wonderpacks are specifically designed for athletic performance, delivering instant energy to your body. They typically are a mix of maltodextrin and fructose (plus added flavours) which both can be processed quickly into fuel.

Most gel users would take them for an event of two hours or more. They typically give you a 100 calorie, +40 minute energy boost, so most manufacturers recommend taking one every 40 minutes – that is, if you can stomach the sticky sweetness of them!

That’s one of the main drawbacks of gels – they taste like a synthetically sweetened honey. If you can get past that, they can be an ideal fuel form. Some people always need a drink with them to wash down the gels.

Some gels have added caffeine – this can be your friend in long runs, but trial them before using them on a race.

Also some gels are more watery than others (high5 for example), which help you swallow them.

Few of us can handle 10+ gels in a row, so it’s important to mix up your race snacking.
OTHER SNACKS

TRAIL MIX, PEANUTS, POTATO CHIPS / CRISPS, PRETZELS

These salty, tasty snacks have about the highest calorie per gram ratio of anything out there – and they tend to be exactly what your body craves a few hours into a run! Crushing up pretzels and chips are a great way to make them fit into a smaller space, and easier to eat while running too. We recommend filling a zip-lock with your salty snacks of choice, then eating handfuls throughout your run, alternating between gels and whatever else you have available.

BANANAS, SWEET POTATOES, PEANUT BUTTER SANDWICHES, CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP...

The list goes on when it comes to race snacks. The trick is to find what works for you, and learn what you can stomach when you’ve been out on the trails for hours on end. You don’t want to eat a banana from an aid station halfway through the race, only to discover it doesn’t agree with your guts! So when selecting your race food, remember – high calorie content, palatable and easy to eat!
**HYDRATION**

Keeping yourself hydrated is important during your marathon, but that doesn’t mean you should just drink as much water as you can. Drinking too much can lead to stomach slosh, or – much worse – hyponatremia, if you mess up your salt balance.

Likewise, dehydration during a run can lead to medical issues, cramp, and certainly doesn’t do your kidneys any good.

It’s been much quoted recently that many more people have died of over-hydration than dehydration during athletic events.

With this in mind, the current medical advice for performing activities where you sweat a lot is to just drink when you feel thirsty. (ref: Medicalnewstoday.com)

Regarding consumption rates, 500ml/hr is regarded as a minimum amount. Typically in a distance running event, as a minimum there will be aid stations every 10km – running at a slow pace, if you drink 1 – 1.5l at each aid station (every 10km) - we find this to be an adequate amount for the average runner in hot conditions – many people find this to be excessive.

As with every aspect of distance running, the trick with keeping your hydration balanced is in the training – experiment with different quantities when you go for a run, and find out what suits you.

Water should be consumed gradually and continuously over a run, in small sips rather than large volumes.

Using a hat to keep the sun off you can aid with sun exposure and preventing dehydration.
BEFORE THE MARATHON
Preparation is everything, and whatever your training schedule looks like, there are a few things you want to prepare for at various milestones before the marathon.

In this section, we cover everything you should be concerned about in the final four weeks before your big day.

Four weeks out is roughly the stage where you want to start tapering, and although your training commitments will be winding down, there’s still a lot to think about and prepare for your marathon.

The trick is to get to the start line in the most prepared and more physically ready state possible – give yourself the best chance possible of getting round those 42.2km comfortably. This means everything from travel plans, to what you should eat, to how you pin your bib onto your t-shirt . . . you don’t want to be leaving any of these decisions until the day of your marathon.

You want to wake up on the day of your marathon feeling well-rested, prepared and knowing exactly what you are going to be doing at every step of the way before the race starts. You also should have a race strategy in place – this is where all your planning and training pays off – running a marathon is really the celebration of all the training you’ve put in – it’s the ‘victory lap’, if you will, of all the hard hours you’ve put in over the past few months.

So in this section, we’ll go through certain things you want to consider at four weeks before the race, one week before the race, the night before the race and the morning of the race.

If you follow the steps included here you should reach the start line calm, rested, and ready to take on those 42.2km to the absolute best of your ability.

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FOUR WEEKS BEFORE THE MARATHON

It’s four weeks before your marathon and your training is around it’s peak – at some point this week you should be starting to taper, if you haven’t already. It’s around this point you will do your longest run – the longest distance you’ll cover by foot prior to the marathon.

Besides your long runs and tapering, it’s time to consider some other aspects of your preparation. Here’s what you want to cover, about a month before the marathon:

**DRESS REHEARSALS**

At least once before your race, you’ve got to go out and do a medium to long training run in all the gear you intend to wear during the actual event. You should schedule this for four weeks before your race to allow time for changing anything. This ‘dry run’ will identify any kinks in your approach before the big race.

Wear every piece of gear you plan to run with. This means hat, sunglasses, shirt, hydration system. The idea is to mimic the conditions of your actual race as best you can.

If you are planning to tape or lubricate your feet before the race, do the same on your Dress Rehearsal.

If you are wearing a pack or a waist-belt, you can learn a lot about how best to pack your backpack so there’s nothing too sharp or uncomfortable rubbing against your back. Sometimes these little things only manifest themselves after 2-3hrs of continuous running.
Food, hydration and salts - whatever your hydration/salt/gel/snack programme is, now is the time to trial it. Get used to using your watch to fuel and hydrate on a regular basis. By now you should also have a hydration / fuelling schedule in mind – now is the time to trial it for any

Do you have the space required to carry everything you want to – be it pockets, a waist belt, a vest? Decide now what you will keep in each one – things like snacks, gels, salts, money, hand sanitizer, etc. and test out the system.

Prepare by thinking of all the eventualities that could happen out on the marathon:

- What if I have a bad stomach and need to use a bathroom?

- What if I get injured and need to get a taxi or ride back to the finish?

- What if that nagging knee injury comes back – can I tape it up mid-race? Should I bring tape?

**STUDY THE ROUTE**

If you haven’t already, now is the time to seriously start studying the marathon route. You should already have figured out what the terrain and gradients are going to be like, and have matched your training accordingly, but now it’s time to get familiar with the actual route. You want to look at things like:

- Where are the start and finish lines? And how do you get there / leave there? Are they closing access roads for the race, in which case transport might be a bit more complex. Is the start line and finish line in different locations?

- Can you have a drop bag? (A bag of personal belongings which you hand in at the start of the race and collect at the end).

- The frequency and location of any inclines. Hopefully you’re already aware of any hills on the route, but now is the time to look at where
they actually occur – if the one big hill on the course is at 37km, you want to keep something in the tank for that one. An even pace is recommended throughout, but if there are significant hills along the way then it often pays to be tactical and slow down (or even walk – with big strides) up the hill.

- Frequency and stock of any aid stations. Some races have aid stations every kilometre, some races every 10km. As a minimum the aid station will supply water, but if you’re lucky and running a well supported race you might find snacks, isotonic drinks and chocolates. Now is the time to familiarise yourself with the aid stations – where you’ll find them and what they will supply, so you can plan accordingly.

- Medical support. We all hope we’ll never need it, but you should check out what kind of medical support is available – and where you’ll find it. There will almost certainly be some form of medical tent at the end of the race, but it’s worth finding out what is available along the way – will there be a medic at each aid station? Every 10km? Best have an idea before you start, just in case something goes wrong.

**RACE REGISTRATION**

Check out the marathon’s website, and familiarise yourself with the race registration process. This is not ‘signing up’ for the race – that took place a few months ago – this is the part where you go and pick up your race bib, often with an ID check to confirm it’s really you. Some races simply mail you out the bib, and others hand you your bib on the day of the race.

These vary depending on the size of the event, but often take place the weekend before the marathon, and sometimes the day before. Often bigger ‘city marathons’ will have a big race expo with stands and promotions, where they also distribute the bibs.
TRAVEL PLANS

One month out is when you want to have your travel plans fully firmed up. This obviously varies a lot depending on the race location and size of the event, but it’s always good to have your travel and accommodation plans mapped out well in advance. Usually the organiser’s website can help you with travel tips and hotel recommendations. Some tips:

- Hotels. Running a big city marathon? Try and book that hotel as far in advance as possible. Hotels within limping distance of the finishing line will be flooded with requests for the marathon weekend, and may well raise their prices. Check them out as soon as you can. Another tip: swimming, and floundering around in a pool, is a great way to relax and soothe your legs after a marathon. If it’s an option, find a hotel with a pool.

- Travel. Again, generally the earlier you can make your travel plans the better. This is especially true if you’re running a marathon in some exotic location which is only served by one plane / train per day – assume that all the runners will be using the same mode of transport as you, and book early.

FUELLING AND NUTRITION STRATEGY

We’ve already covered marathon fuelling in-depth, so we suggest you skip ahead to get the full lowdown on what to eat and when to eat it while running. Needless to say, you should have trialled everything you plan to eat several times before the marathon. Now, four weeks out, you should have a good idea of your fuelling strategy – whether it’s to eat a gel every hour, or simply to have a banana at the start line – now is the time to get that strategy pegged down.
Pace

Pace. We could talk about pace all day. Running at an even pace is one of our key tenets to successfully completing a marathon (See CONSISTENT PACE = KEY TO SUCCESS on page 20). So why are we bringing it up again?

Because, now you are only four weeks away from running your marathon, this is the perfect time to re-visit your planned pace. With the majority of your training now under your belt, are you confident with the pace you’ve set yourself? If you are doing your regularly runs at marathon pace, and your long runs around 1min/km slower, then you’re golden. Otherwise, you might want to consider dialling it back slightly. We recommend locking down your target pace around now – four weeks out – so mentally you have prepared yourself to run at that speed, and don’t have any last minute doubts or change of heart.

DON’T DO ANYTHING NEW

Your body is at it’s peak right now, and the next four weeks is simply about preserving it and resting it.

For that reason, now is not the time to take up Muay Thai boxing, or to decide you want to start a trendy new diet. If you can, don’t plan any serious travel for the month before the marathon.

Stick to what has been working, keep your head down and follow the tapering laid out in your training plan. The last thing you want at this point is to get injured or ill. Look after yourself, you’re getting close to the start line!
ONE WEEK BEFORE THE MARATHON

OK now the marathon is practically in your sights. You’ve spent the previous few weeks tapering, and by now you should be feeling rested and prepared. This week is all about looking after yourself, and getting to the start line in optimal condition.

KEEP LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

As we noted in the ‘FOUR WEEKS’ section above, it’s critical to look after yourself this week.

Getting ill this week can completely kill your marathon plans – even if you recover enough to attempt the marathon, you are still sacrificing all your training.

So looking after yourself really is number one for this week.

If that colleague you sit next to starts coughing, move away from them. Take extra care with personal hygiene, and only eat quality foods from places you really trust. If in doubt, cook yourself. And soups are good – they’re nutritious and the boiling process keeps them healthy!

RUN THROUGH THE 48HRS BEFORE THE RACE

One week before the marathon, sit down and run through the 48hrs before the race. Where are you going to stay, how are you going to get to the start line, which clothes are you going to take with you, and so on. Clearly picture in your head every part of the build-up to the race, then the race itself and the period after the race.
RUN (A LITTLE)

As per your training plan, you want to run a little. You should do an abridged “long run” one week before the marathon, then perhaps two more very short and low-intensity runs through the week – the number will depend on your level and training plan.

These runs keep your legs limber and loose, so they’re ready come race day.

STRETCH (BUT DON’T DO ANYTHING NEW)

It’s likely that you’ve incorporated some cross-training into your tapering period, and that’s great. It fills in the gaps in your training schedule as you wind down your running training, and keeps your body active.

If your cross-training includes pilates, yoga or gym work, that’s great – just make sure you aren’t incorporating anything new into your training at this point. If the instructor decides to take you through a complex leg stretch, or asks you to push a bit harder when working on the hamstrings, just politely explain you’ve got a big race coming up so are being delicate with your legs.

REST AND EAT

This week, you’re allowed to relax a bit more. ‘Carb loading’ is a favourite of all marathoners – eating carb-rich foods this week will give your body more fuel to burn through on race day. Note that fuelling strategies differ, and especially these days not every runner conforms with the ‘carb-loading’ programmes that used to be standard. If you’re a beginner, it won’t hurt to stick to hearty evening meals with some pasta.

Doctors say that it’s most important to get a good sleep two nights before the race, so if your marathon is on a Sunday, make sure you give yourself the best possible rest on Friday night.
THE DAY BEFORE

By now you should have completed race registration, have all your equipment, clothing and bags looked out, know exactly what your travel arrangements before and after the race are going to look like . . . you should be ready to eat those 42.2km.

WHAT TO EAT

Avoid caffeine if you can. The night before a race, you’re likely to be nervous enough as it is – adding any stimulants to your body won’t help. Avoid alcohol too – there’ll be plenty of time for that on the other side of the 42.2km.

Unless you’re following a set dietary plan, we advise you eat heartily – without over-eating. Stick to carb-rich foods to give your body fuel. Don’t eat a huge plate of meat just before going to bed – in fact, try to eat at least 3-4 hours before bed.

PREPARE EVERYTHING

OK here are the final steps. You’re getting your gear together for the final time, before you put it on tomorrow morning. The trick is to do everything that you can possibly do the day before the race, to minimise your workload, and panic, on the morning of the race. Here’s exactly what you want to do:

- Set two alarms. You’re getting up early, but you still want some good sleep. If nothing else, setting two alarms gives you piece of mind that you’re not going to sleep in.

- Set out everything you need. This means running shoes, socks, shorts, shirt, hat, GPS watch, food, salts, money, iPod – have it all neatly laid out, so when you get up in the morning you simply have to put it all on.
- Plan what to eat pre-race. This is discussed in the next section, but you should have it prepared the night before.

- Pin your bib to your race shirt. You don’t want to be nervously pinning the bib on in the morning before the race, so do it the night before. Tip: it’s easiest to pin these in place while wearing the shirt.

REVISE THE RACE INFORMATION

It’s good to check over all the tiny details again, one more time. Check what time you’re meant to arrive at the start line, remind yourself where the aid stations are, what is available at the finish line, etc.
THE MORNING OF THE RACE

Here it is, the big day!

You should have everything laid out and ready to go, so you simply wake up, wash and go.

RACE DAY CHECKLIST

Here’s a checklist of the essentials – and some optional items – to check for race day:

- Running shoes
- Shorts
- Shirt
- Socks
- Hat
- Sunglasses
- Gloves, if cold
- Extra clothing layer, if cold
- Suncream, especially on your face and back of your neck.
- Lubricant / anti-chafe cream on your feet, thighs and nipples (band-aids also work on nipples).
- Race bib
- Safety pins
- Gels, drinks, snacks
- Medication, if required.

WHAT TO EAT

Your goals for eating before a running event should be:

i) eat something that will fuel your event
ii) don’t try anything new or exotic
iii) don’t eat anything that might unsettle your stomach
Typically, in the hours before the race starts people will eat light. Before your event you should have prepared sufficiently that you know what your body can accept and process before a long run.

Examples are porridge / oatmeal, bananas, or smoothies. Smoothies are a great way to throw several fuel sources together – bananas, nuts, seeds, peanut butter – and turn them into an easy-to-digest drink!

As long as your stomach allows it, you should each something solid at least two hours before the race starts – as marathons usually start early in the morning, you may wish to eat as soon as you wake up.

**WARMING UP**

Most races start early in the morning, so you’re likely to have just gotten out of bed and made your way to the start line. For this reason, it’s a good idea to do something to let your legs warm up a little before you start.

This means power-walking to the marathon, and doing some light jogging repeats in the 30 minutes before the race starts, to get your legs ready.

**GO TO THE TOILET**

Even if you went to the toilet 30 minutes earlier, there’s a good chance you’ll unexpectedly realise you need to go just before the start line. Pre-race jitters gets to everybody, and there are often lines at the facilities in the 20 minutes before the race kicks off – a lot of nervous stomachs! Factor in a trip to the bathroom, and if in doubt perhaps bring along some wet wipes too, just in case.

**LAST MINUTE FUELLING**

The 30 minutes before the race starts is quite a good time to have any last-minute snacks – be it sweets, crisps or a gel. Food takes an absolute
minimum of 15 minutes to be converted into fuel by your body, so plan accordingly.
DURING THE MARATHON
Finally, the main event is here!

The months of training are about to pay off – you should look at the actual marathon as a celebration of your months of hard work – it’s finally here, and you’re ready to kill it!

If you’ve followed our guide so far, then hopefully your marathon is a smooth and enjoyable experience – a culmination of the hours of running you’ve put in, and the preparation you’ve invested in.

Therefore, this section covers things that you might experience during your marathon, and how you’d deal with them. They’re written from experience rather than informed by science, and hopefully it gives you an insight into what to expect.

**THE START LINE**

Start lines can be busy, crowded places. In big races, runners are divided into groups based on their projected finish times. Our tip is to try and get close to the start of your group ‘area’, to minimise getting caught up in the herd. In the huge city marathons (London, New York), it’s typical that your first 20-30 minutes are simply done at a walking pace due to the density of the runners around you. So ideally you want to find some space, and the best place to do that is usually right at the front of your group. Don’t worry if you feel you’re lining up with faster runners – don’t be intimidated, they’ll take off right at the start and leave you to run your own race. Just do your best not to get swamped by a mass of runners.

**GUN TIME VS. CHIP TIME**

Most races these days record your time via ‘chip time’ – this is done by a little micro chip that they put either in your bib or attach to your shoe, and it accurately records exactly when you cross the start and finish lines. This way, if you’re in a huge crowd when the race starts and it takes you five minutes to even cross the start line, then this time is not counted.
‘Gun Time’ is your time from the official start of the race, i.e. when the flag is dropped or the gun is fired. Although your gun time may be recorded, your chip time is much more accurate and is the one that you and the race organisers will quote at the end of the race as your ‘official time.’

DON’T FORGET YOUR GPS

So many runners simply forget to start their GPS watches at the start line of a race. They get swept up in the atmosphere, then look at their wrist after a couple of kilometres and curse that they forgot to turn it on.

Don’t let this be you. Remember to switch on your GPS watch in good time before the start in order to find a GPS signal, and remember to ‘start’ to record your run when your race starts – usually this will be when you cross the start line and go over the timing mat (i.e. recording your chip time, as opposed to your gun time). Tip: when your lining up at the start line, keep your thumb over the ‘START” button of your GPS watch to ensure you don’t forget to push it.

PACE IS CRITICAL

Pace is critical – we’ve said it before, but it bears repeating.

You’ve trained for months. You should have had a specific marathon pace in mind for the past few weeks. Whatever you do, don’t change your mind at the start line and decide you’re going to push harder – especially if it’s your first marathon. Your GPS is your friend, so check it regularly and stick to your target pace religiously, even if everyone around you is taking off. If you can hold a steady pace, you’ll pass many of them later, trust us.

EVEN SPLITS = SUCCESS

If pace is king, then even splits is the route to the crown.
A ‘split’ is what a certain section of the course is called. Typically, a marathon is split into several equal-sized chunks – there are timing mats along the way, and they record how long it takes you to cover each section. They may record your pace every 10.5km, or every kilometre – regardless, your aim is to make all of these splits identical – meaning that the first section of the race should be run at identical time to the last section.

In other words, run a consistent pace.

In a typical marathon, if you run a consistent pace of say 6 min 45 sec per kilometre for the whole race (giving a finishing time of 4hr 45min), then you’ll be witness to a strange and gratifying phenomenon.

What you’ll find is that for roughly the first half of the race, you’ll constantly be getting overtaken by other runners. You may pass a few people who have fallen by the wayside, but by and large you’re going to be getting passed much more than you are passing.

It’s somewhere around the halfway mark that something weird happens, and this flips completely. You’ll find the stream of runners passing you begins to tail off, then stop entirely – for a while, you’ll be running with evenly-paced runners. Then, you’ll start to pick them off. One by one, you’ll pass the runners ahead of you – the same runners who floated past you in the first half of the race. Now, their once-buoyant legs are starting to feel heavy, their confidence has faded and their lack of planning is clear – and your strategy pays off.

As you continue through the second half of the race, this will only continue, with more and more people ‘hitting the wall’ as you cruise by. You may have slowed a little, but your training has prepared you to run at a consistent pace.

When you get to the finish line, look around for runners that are smiling and look satisfied with their performance. Those are the guys who ran even splits - they’re the guys that stuck to a consistent pace.
NEGATIVE SPLITS = EVEN BETTER

If Even Splits, are the key to success, then negative splits are some kind of Jedi-level move. Negative splits are where you continually speed up throughout your marathon. If this is your first-ever marathon, then Negative Splits may be too ambitious a target. If you have a few races under your belt however, and are comfortable with your performance and pace, negative splits can be a great way to race well, finish strong and look after your body. If you google the splits of any record-breaking marathon run, you’ll see that all the successful elites run a Negative Split.

GETTING SWEPT ALONG

Alright, one more point on pacing that we have to flag up.

In a big marathon event, it’s inevitable that you are running in a crowd, and it’s likely that you’ll experience the sensation of being ‘swept along’ during the first few kilometres.

This is when the atmosphere and adrenaline take over, and you feel yourself prancing along the road alongside the other runners, with no regard for pace – it just feels easy, it feels great!

This can be a great experience – at least for a short while – but remember to check in with your GPS. It’s not uncommon to be getting swept along and end up running a full minute/kilometre faster than you think you are – when everything feels so light and breezy, you just feel like you can keep going forever.

We recommend just keeping an eye on your GPS, reminding yourself you’ve still got a long way ahead of you, and trying to stick to your target pace – it might feel a little like you’re throwing the brakes on, but your body will thank you in the latter stages of the marathon.
CROWDS, SUPPORT AND MUSIC

In a similar vein to being ‘swept along’, crowds of supporters and family / friends can have a surprising effect on your performance. Hearing people shout your name, or seeing them clap and cheer you on can really give you a boost, in a similar way to listening to your favourite upbeat songs can.

On that note, if you feel like listening to music during your marathon, that’s great – there are studies that prove it can help with cardiovascular performance. Just remember that in certain situations they can be a personal risk if you can’t hear other people, or vehicles around you. At the end of the day, part of the experience of a marathon can be soaking in the atmosphere, and listening to music may remove you slightly from the present. One suggestion for music during a marathon is to save it until the latter stages, where you know you’re going to have to dig deep.

EATING

We’ve already covered at length what to eat and what your fuelling strategy should be for running (see NUTRITION + FUELLING on page 56) but there are a couple of specific points to bear in mind during your actual marathon.

One is that you are likely to be offered food along the way – this could be sweets, fruit, isotonic drinks, or just about anything else. If you feel like eating it, then go for it – but bear in mind not to deviate too far from your own fuelling strategy.

For example, eating a banana during a marathon can be a huge mistake if you haven’t done this during training – they can lead to stomach cramps. Same goes for energy gels – if you haven’t trained with them, it’s unwise to wait until marathon day to experiment with them. They give many experienced athletes upset stomachs, so learn what works for your body well in advance of the marathon.

The other thing to bear in mind is to match your fuelling strategy to the marathon course – if the course is flat and dull, then you can space out...
your fuelling evenly. If there’s a big hill at the 37km mark however, you want to plan to fuel up in preparation for that obstacle.

**AID STATIONS**

Aid stations are a welcome method of support, providing water and often snacks and medical help. Make sure you’ve researched exactly what is being provided at the aid stations before you set off.

Some bigger marathons have aid stations that provide muscle-relaxing sprays, cold wet sponges, etc. Check these out beforehand and assess whether they’re a good idea – don’t just stop and get the muscle spray if you don’t feel you need it.

The number one rule for aid stations should be – don’t stop. If you stop and stand still, or worse, sit down, then starting moving again is exponentially harder. When you reach an aid station, keep running, or walking if you have to, and grab the snacks and water as you move.

**TOILETS**

Try and get an idea where there are going to be toilets on the route before you start your race. It’s common to get a nervous stomach during your marathon, and even if your tummy has handled gels and sports nutrition well during training, things can change on the day itself. Having an idea where the toilets are gives you plenty of time to plan ahead.

**HITTING THE WALL**

Hitting the wall is a common occurrence in first marathons, especially if you’re underprepared.

Hitting the wall means reaching physical exhaustion – it’s when your body stops co-operating and starts telling you to stop. Your muscles’ glycogen levels are bottoming out. It makes every single step five times harder –
rather than gliding forward, now every single pace requires some exertion of will power, to overcome your body’s desires to stop.

Proper pacing and fuelling with sports drinks and gels can prevent your glycogen levels from vanishing to zero.

Usually, it hits you in the final 5 – 10km of the marathon, and doesn’t go away. Your upper legs will typically become heavy and be very reluctant to move. You’ll find it very hard to muster energy to do anything other than walk at an average pace, and mentally you’ll be feeling rather low.

The bad news is that pushing through ‘the wall’ will make your body sore the next day – it’s telling you it’s time to stop, and you’re telling it that it has to keep going.

It can be easy to reach this stage and feel like you should stop – you’ve given it your best shot, but your body has said no, and you feel terrible – everything would be so much easier if you just stopped now.

The trick to overcoming the wall is to remind yourself exactly how far you’ve got left – probably only 7-8km at best, and that you’ve covered this distance dozens of times during training. Remind yourself that no matter what happens, you can still walk to the finish line – and if that’s all you’re capable of, that’s what you’ll do. You might lose a little bit of your ego along the way, but what’s important is finishing, not getting across the line under a specific time.

Hitting the wall is horrible, and runners who experience this have a much tougher day than those who glide to the finish line. But at the same time, the reasons you’ve hit the wall are rarely severe enough to justify stopping – it becomes a mental game, so get your game face on and plough through.

HOT SPOTS

Hot spots are any kind of ache of pain in your feet experienced while running. Often they’re an early indicator of the onset of blisters, so it’s important to be aware of them.
Assuming you’ve prepared sufficiently and trained in the same socks and shoes that you are doing the marathon in, it’s unlikely you’ll experience any serious hot spot issues – you may develop some pain towards the end of the marathon, once you’re into ‘virgin mileage’ – but that should be OK.

If you do experience hot spots, then you should at least consider what could be causing them. It’s totally dependent on the scenario – how much pain you have, how quickly it has developed, and how far into your marathon you are.

Does it feel like it could just be some bunched-up socks rubbing against your sole? If it comes on quickly, then that’s probably what it is. In this case, it’s usually worth stopping for a second and trying to un-bunch your sock – you might even be able to do this without taking your shoes off.

If it seems to be something more severe, then it’s up to you whether to address it. If it feels like something is in your shoe / sock – like a stone or piece of grit, then it’s worth checking this out and seeing if you can clear it.

If it just seems like the onset of a blister caused by regular running, then there’s little you can do during the marathon. Even if you wanted to drain the blister, it’s unlikely you’d be able to do it in a hygienic manner (let alone have something to pop it). In extreme circumstances, people have used the pins on their bibs to pop blisters.

With any hot spots during a marathon, bear in mind that if you can get to the finish line, you can address them later – no matter how hideous they are. It might not be pretty, but sometimes persevering with blisters is the best option available.

**SORE SHOULDERS**

This is a common complaint during marathons . . . the act of running actually uses a little bit of your upper body, and your shoulders can start to get tired. Bear in mind that this is fairly common towards the end of a marathon, and don’t let it trouble you too much.
**PAINKILLERS IN MARATHONS**

It’s fairly common to take painkillers during marathons – they help dull the pain caused by fatigue in your legs.

If you’re considering taking painkillers as a preventative measure, we’d recommend taking a maximum of two – one at the start, and one in the latter stages. If you’re not sure if you need them, don’t take them – simple. You may want to keep one in a pocket for the latter stages, but plan not to take it.

An important note is the type of painkillers you should take during a marathon – stick to Paracetamol (other brand names: Tylenol, Panadol, Anacin, etc). You should avoid any kind of anti-inflammatory medication during a marathon (Ibuprofen, Aspirin, Advil, Nurofen, etc.). This type of painkiller really taxes your kidneys, and during an endurance event where you’re already sweating a lot, possibly de-hydrated and working your kidneys, the last thing you want is to stress them more.

As an aside, once you’ve finished the marathon, had some water and relaxed, then it is safe to take anti-inflammatories. But while running – stick to a paracetamol.

**WHEN INJURIES OCCUR**

No matter how much you train and prepare, there’s always the chance of an injury occurring during your marathon.

What to do?

If it’s a sudden pain, for example a sharp pain in the leg, then you should stop running – walk for a while and see what happens. If there is medical help at the next aid station, then seek advice.

If you’re experiencing a dull ache or growing pain, then only run when you feel you can – otherwise see if walking can help.
Dealing with injuries during a marathon is not easy, and the circumstances change based on the nature of the injury and how far into the marathon you are.

We’d suggest that if you’re injured and you think that continuing to run could cause lasting damage to your body, stop running – at least walk. See if any medical support is available, and weigh up what you’re likelihood of finishing is against the potential damage you could cause to your body.

**THE ART OF THE DNF**

DNF = “Did Not Finish”.

This is what the race organiser will put against your ‘race time’ field in the event that you drop out.

It’s a horrible thought to consider that after all your training, you’ll drop out for some reason, but consider this – almost every serious distance runner has had at least one DNF in their running careers.

Maybe their stomach gave out during the race.

Maybe that old nagging knee injury re-appeared at the half-way point, and put their PB attempt to bed.

Maybe they’d been fighting off a flu the week leading up to the race.

Maybe they weren’t as prepared as they assumed they were.

Whatever the reason behind it, the point is that DNF’s can happen to anybody.

The trick is to use a DNF as motivation to get back up and re-attempt next time. Did your legs give out on kilometre 35 this year?

Then good news - you’ve got a full 12 months to prepare and get ready to kill the same race next year.
AFTER THE MARATHON
You’ve made it!

You’ve managed to get yourself across the finish line, hopefully smiling and giving the camera a thumbs up.

Most of what we’re going to tell you in this section is general advice to help you recover faster – but the main thing you care about is that you’ve just finished your first marathon! We realise your priorities are likely to be beer and burgers . . .

Anyway, here’s some things to bare in mind:

**KEEP MOVING**

If you managed to run all the way to the finish line, that’s fantastic. But beware, that lactic acid is waiting in the wings to jump in and stiffen up your legs as soon as you stop moving. So walk around for a good 15 minutes or so once you cross the finish line – don’t sit down and let those legs go stiff.

Walk over to collect your medal, walk to the burger stall, whatever – just don’t be too quick to flake out, or you will find it much harder to get up again.

**DRINK AND EAT**

Continue to drink water when you finish – your legs may have stopped racing, but your internal organs haven’t.

And eat – preferably something as substantial and hearty as you can stomach. It helps kick-start your body’s recover process. Something with high protein content is advised.
ELEVATE YOUR LEGS + STRETCH

Once you’ve walked off the stiffness, grab a seat on the floor and raise your legs up on a chair or wall – this helps drain the excess fluid from them, preventing them from becoming too stiff or swollen. If you can, remain here for twenty minutes of so, and do some gentle stretching – you’ll be grateful for it in the coming days, trust us!

PHYSIO + MASSAGE

Better than stretching yourself is getting someone else to do it for you. Likewise, getting a leg massage can really help relieve your tired leg muscles. Some of the bigger marathons organise post-race masseuses – if you can get one of these, go for it!

TEND TO BLISTERS

Now is the time to clean up any foot issues you’ve had. If they’re minor, you can usually leave them alone and they’ll gradually disappear on their own over a few days. If they’re big, or contain blood, you want to drain them hygienically – clean the whole foot first, especially the area around the blister, then pop it with a sterilised needle at three or four points around the perimeter. Let the blister drain, then consider applying some dressing if the skin flap is left loose – your foot won’t be ready to lose the old skin yet to keep the area covered and protected.

TO THE POOL

If you can, get to a swimming pool. They are one of the best ways to recover. Simply walking around the shallow end of a pool can be a great way to treat your legs after a marathon, and doing strokes like the breast stroke can ease your muscles and help with recovery.
POST-MARATHON BLUES

In the days following your successful marathon, don’t be surprised if you feel a little bit melancholic. The reason is that you’ve just completed a major challenge, a task that took over a large chunk of your life – and now, believe it or not, you miss the sense of achievement and hard work that you got from all the training. Now it’s over, and you’ll never be able to run another first marathon again.

Bear in mind that you’re likely to be physically laid up too – and not just your legs and feet. Running a marathon puts a tremendous stress on the body, and over the next few days your internals will be working overtime to heal your tired muscles and rebuild itself.

This means that your immune system may be depleted, and you may be more susceptible to viruses and bugs.

Use this period to rest up, don’t do anything physically demanding and try not to expose yourself unnecessarily to viruses or unsanitary places. Get plenty of sleep, eat some ice cream and congratulate yourself!

THE NEXT RACE

Some marathoners are ‘one-and-dones’ – they complete their first ever marathon and are satisfied.

Others go home and immediately sign up for the next race.

Whichever camp you’re in, give yourself a few days to sit back and process the experience. Remember to reflect on the amount of training you’ve put in, and your new physical powers, and how you’ll lose them if you don’t keep training regularly.

You’ve climbed to the top of a mountain and reached it’s peak, now do you really want to start roll down the other side, or do you want to aim for that next peak – off in the distance – now you’re up here, it’s suddenly much easier to get there.
CONCLUSION
MARATHON HANDBOOK GUIDE: HOW TO TRAIN FOR AND RUN A MARATHON

Running a marathon is not for the faint of heart.

It pushes your body to limits otherwise unknown.

It demands a significant block of commitment and eats into your personal life.

Committing to a marathon is committing to prolonged spells of discomfort with no guaranteed reward at the end.

But – if you can put in the hours of discomfort, and avoid the pitfalls of injury or exhaustion – you’ll find all the training and pain are redeemed in full on race day.

Some people run a marathon, go straight home and sign up for another one. Other people cross the finish line and go back to their old lives, happy to have completed the challenge but not looking to revisit it any time soon.

Whichever group you fall into, we hope this book has been of some help. We hope you’ve taken some helpful information from us and, if nothing else, bear in mind our two key tenets:

- Preparation is **everything**. Design a good training plan and stick to it.

- Run your race at a **constant, planned speed**. Don’t go out too fast – just follow your training.

Otherwise, we just hope you enjoy the experience. Running a marathon is a major achievement that you’ll find can positively influence other areas of your life.

If you have any questions, get in touch at [hi@marathonhandbook.com](mailto:hi@marathonhandbook.com) and we’ll do our best to help you, whether you’re looking for shoe advice or a remedy to chafing. And head over to [www.marathonhandbook.com](http://www.marathonhandbook.com) for much more marathon-related articles, race reports and blogs!

Run Far!

- Marathon Handbook

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APPENDIX
- TRAINING PLANS
Here are two of our most-requested training plans – the 3 month and 5 month plans. Both are designed for the first-time marathoner / novice. The 5 month plan is considered a good ‘benchmark’ training plan for the typical first-time marathoner, which they can then customise to suit their training needs and schedules – see the section on Training Plans on page 29 for more on this.

The 3 month plan should be considered an ‘accelerated’ programme, for runners with a good base cardiovascular fitness – be warned it does ramp up the mileage quicker, and doesn’t leave much room for any downtime!

We hope you fine them useful and that you customise them as required to suit your current level of fitness, preparation time and marathon goals.

**Download them in fully-customisable Excel-format spreadsheets here:**

http://www.marathonhandbook.com/trainingplans
## 5 MONTH NOVICE TRAINING PLAN – KILOMETRES

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## 5 MONTH NOVICE TRAINING PLAN – MILES

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## 3 Month Novice Training Plan – Kilometres

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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### 3 Month Novice Training Plan - Miles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>3 mile</td>
<td>5 mile</td>
<td>1hr cross-training</td>
<td>3 mile</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>Long Slow Run - 6 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3 mile</td>
<td>5 mile</td>
<td>1hr cross-training</td>
<td>3 mile</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>Long Slow Run - 9 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>4 mile</td>
<td>6 mile</td>
<td>1hr cross-training</td>
<td>4 mile</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>Long Slow Run - 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>4 mile</td>
<td>6 mile</td>
<td>1hr cross-training</td>
<td>4 mile</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>Long Slow Run - 13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>4 mile</td>
<td>7 mile</td>
<td>1hr cross-training</td>
<td>4 mile</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>Long Slow Run - 15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
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<td>7 mile</td>
<td>1hr cross-training</td>
<td>5 mile</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>Long Slow Run - 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7 mile</td>
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<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>Long Slow Run - 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>8 mile</td>
<td>1hr cross-training</td>
<td>5 mile</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>Long Slow Run - 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
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<td>5 mile</td>
<td>6 mile</td>
<td>1hr cross-training</td>
<td>5 mile</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>Long Slow Run - 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>4 mile</td>
<td>5 mile</td>
<td>1hr cross-training</td>
<td>4 mile</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>Long Slow Run - 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
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<td>3 mile</td>
<td>3 mile</td>
<td>1hr cross-training</td>
<td>3 mile</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>Long Slow Run - 8 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.5hr cross-training</td>
<td>2 mile</td>
<td>Rest Day</td>
<td>Marathon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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