



Train for a Marathon

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By Kenya McCullum

Are you someone who used to run all the time — perhaps in marathons — but somehow got out of practice? Maybe life got in the way and you were too busy. Maybe you suffered from an injury that made you shy away from getting out there again. Whatever the case may be, if you have a renewed interest in the workouts you enjoyed so much, you don't have to stand on the sidelines and cheer on your friends who run marathons — you can get back on track and join them. Here are some tips to help you train for a marathon — no matter how long it's been since your last run.

Slow down

What? Slow down? Aren't we training for a marathon here? Believe it or not, the best way to get back into the swing of running regularly is to start slow. In fact, trainer David Levine — who coauthored *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Marathon Training* (Alpha, 2011) with Paula Petrella — says the majority of your training should be done at a lower intensity, which gives you the opportunity to build up your mileage, avoid injury, and allow your body to enjoy all the benefits of running.

"Never race up that hill unless you're ready to race up the hill — walk up the hill instead," Levine says. "I know it sounds crazy, but every day I do this. I meet people and I hold them back, and they'll do things that they've never done in their lives before — and they'll be thrilled about it."

Levine also points out the worst thing you can do while getting ready for a marathon is to overtrain; it potentially could cause an injury that will derail your progress. To avoid this, Levine suggests you begin training with low-aerobic-intensity workouts and build up your mileage slowly — no more than 10 percent at a time — as your body can handle it, until you reach your peak performance.

In time, Levine says, you can begin to add speed workouts, such as running up hills or running fast around a track, to your regimen. Again, start slowly: First add one intense workout a week, then a second after a while, and then possibly a third — but only if your body can handle it.

Listen to your body

We've all heard the "no pain, no gain" adage about exercise. Although that might sound like a good way to get the best performance from your body, working out when you're hurt won't get you to the finish line. Instead, pay attention to what's going on with your body, and slow down if your body can't handle what you're doing.

"It's a matter of becoming attuned to your body and understanding what you can expect from it," says Petrella. "Nowadays, we know what the body is capable of, so sticking to a good schedule will probably bring you to the finish line."

Don't forget cross-training

Cross-training is a great way to remain active on days you're not running, while giving your body a rest from the rigors of your training program. Things like strength training, bicycling, swimming, and power yoga all have benefits in their own right that will keep you active on your days off from running.

Get in touch with your sole

As you're training, take good care of your feet. Misalignments can add up and cause a serious injury, so it's important to have running shoes that are right for your feet — as well as have a doctor correct any anatomical issues that affect your ability to run.

Diet and hydration

Eating right is especially important as you're training for your marathon. Be sure to eat more carbohydrates when you're going on a long run, which will help your energy levels, while decreasing your calories when you are running for shorter periods of time.

In addition, be sure to drink plenty of water — about eight ounces an hour before your workout and four ounces every 15 minutes as you're running.

Get support

Major cities have organizations for marathon runners that will give you the social support you need, as well as tips and tricks that will get you through your training. If you don't have access to a runners' group in your city, a personal trainer can support you as you train.

Enjoy the journey

Sometimes people get so focused on getting ready for a marathon they forget training is an enjoyable journey, not just a destination.

"The end goal, running a marathon, is a neat goal to have, but there's a lot that goes into it," says Dr. Joseph Quatrochi, professor of Human Performance and Sport at the Metropolitan State College of Denver. "It's not just a means to an end, there are also so many benefits — the social benefits, spending time outside, clearing your head, getting that runner's high endorphin rush — all of which are something you can focus on as you're training."

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