

## Prepare yourself for a Marathon

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To run a marathon well, you must train both your body and mind, in preparation for your race. You must concentrate on improving your physical fitness and have the motivation and determination to stay focused on your training schedule and the goals you set for yourself.

You must plan a steady training regime. Make sure you do not over train and gradually build up fitness to prepare your body for long distance running.

Depending on the length of the marathon, you should begin training. If it is more than 40-50 km you should begin at least six months ahead of your marathon goal. If shorter distances then even 1 month 2-3 months is also sufficient.

### Exercise Program

Warm up: Always warm up first. A good ten minutes of stretches and loosening up of all the muscles and joints in your body is essential to get the most out of your training session and to ensure you don't have aches and pains the next day.

Cardio Vascular Training: Plan on training at least 4-5 days a week. Determine how far you will jog and the route you will take.

- A beginner's schedule should include a 20 minute jog at least three days a week. This can be built up over time to cover greater distances at a faster pace.
- As time goes by gradually build up to longer jogs, mixed with timed runs.
- Hold practice races to keep a track of your endurance fitness and the ability to run long distances.

Strength Training: You can go to a gym alongside your jogging. Make sure you receive a proper induction on all the equipment before you start on the machines. It's also useful to ask for a fitness instructor to talk you through what muscles each piece of equipment works on and to plan a workout program that will benefit you the most.

Diet: To prepare for a marathon you need to eat a healthy diet and drink plenty of fluids to maximize your metabolism and ensure you are not putting on excess fat. Eating smaller, more frequent meals and eating lots of fresh fruit and vegetables will help you to lose weight that will slow you down in the race and also take in the most energy from your food.

Imp: Make sure your doctor knows your plans, and ask for any advice about how you can stay healthy and safe while training.

## How often should you be working out?

Before you begin marathon training, you should be able to run for at least 30 minutes without stopping. Distance is not important right now. You just need to get your body used to running. Combinations of run/walks are great to use during pre-training because they ease your body into the exercise and minimize the chance of experiencing a running injury.

### Weekly Schedule

Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday: walk 6-8 kms.

Monday, Wednesday, Friday: Days off.

Sunday: Long runs - Mileage building day

Your mileage should gradually increase each week with your longest run being 20-25 kms.

### **Marathon Day:**

Tapering in the final weeks before the marathon will help your body recover from marathon training and be strong for your big day.

## How to improve your stamina?

You need to have a good balance in your training of solid, steady running, mixed with faster, more up-tempo bursts. These up-tempo runs consist of interval training, which means you differ your speed within a run.

You could start off doing eight three-minute runs at a very fast pace, with one minute's brisk walk in between each.

This minute of walking gives you a chance to recover, but keeps your heart rate from dropping too much. This is important because you must stay active during this recovery period.

Your slow, steady period involves running for longer at a steadier pace. That may mean anything from 20 minutes for novices to a three-hour run for more experienced athletes.

If you are specifically training for the marathon, I suggest running four to five times a week to build up the stamina. This should consist of both steady runs, three times weekly, and up-tempo runs twice weekly.

Going to the gym to do some weight training also builds stamina, and it's a crucial part of your training. You can't expect to become a top-class runner without putting in a couple of sessions of weight training each week.

Your goal should not be to bulk up like a bodybuilder, just to tone up and become leaner and stronger. As well as leg exercises, such as lunges and squats, it's important to work on your upper-body strength — arms, shoulders, back and abdominals.

Only when your whole body is strong can you become a better and more efficient runner.

For most runners, weight training twice a week is sufficient.

Mental stamina is a different thing altogether. Running is quite tough mentally, and a running partner can really help you through the bad patches.

Building mental stamina is essential. It's one thing to be motivated to begin training. It's another to stay motivated every day. Naturally, we think running a marathon will not be easy. Staying

motivated and developing the proper mindset is key to enjoying training and crossing the finish line with a smile on your face.

### How to improve your running skills?

To become a better runner, you need to work on your running mechanics and interval training

Running mechanics is basically, utilizing your given body to maximize efficiency. Not everyone is built like a Kenyan with long thin legs and skinny upperbody built to run long distances. But everyone can learn to run more efficiently.

- Relax the arms and shoulders, and minimize upper body swing. You basically want to keep a relaxed and still upper body while the lower body does most of the work. A balanced stride run more frequently is more efficient than trying to lengthen your stride to an uncomfortable length. Don't do too much up and down motion either. You should feel like your upper body is almost horizontally still or just bobbing, not bouncing up and down.
- Also, important to running is strength training the legs and your core muscles. Running will work your muscles a certain way but it will never push the muscles to strengthen itself beyond a certain level. While your goals are not to bulk up, doing higher reps 12-16 on leg exercises and working on the core will help your running.

Interval training is basically switching up sprints with walking/jogging. Basically you are training your muscles, lungs, and heart to recover. By taxing your body to 100% and then allowing it to recover, you give it lots of practice doing exactly that. And also, when you are distance running, your heart and lungs work at only about 50-60% of max (for fit runners) so it's good to work your body at peak exertion so that it learns to get stronger.

### What kind of diet to follow?

Eat a variety of food from each of the four major food groups each day (breads and cereals; vegetables and fruits; milk, dairy products and milk substitutes, especially low-fat varieties; lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts and meat substitutes like lentils, chickpeas, soy beans and other beans).

Prepare meals with minimal added fat (especially saturated fat) and salt.

Drink plenty of fluids each day.

If drinking alcohol do so in moderation.

Remember that the above are general nutrition guidelines that provide the foundation for a healthy diet. As a marathon runner you need to get your basic diet right before you begin to work on your training and competition diet.

- Breads and cereal (recommended serves 6)
- Vegetables and fruits (recommended serves 2 fruit & 3 vegetables)
- Milk, dairy products and milk substitutes (recommended serves 2)
- Meat and meat substitutes (recommended serves 1)
- Fluids (recommended serves 8 cups)

Don't forget about protein: While carbohydrates are important as a source of fuel, proteins will help repair muscle tissue and prevent muscle breakdown.

Carbohydrates provide the fuel runners need. During marathon training, 65% of your total calories should come from carbohydrates, particularly complex carbohydrates. 10% should come from protein. 20-25% of your total calories should come from unsaturated fats. Be sure to get the nutrition you need to keep you strong and allow for adequate recovery.

### **Before the race**

Have a small carbohydrate meal -- it should be low in fibre and fat -- to prevent delay in digestion around two hours (or as your tolerance indicates) before the event.

- Cold cereal, Bananas, Wholewheat bread

### **During the race**

Your number one priority should be to consume adequate fluids during the race.

Don't wait for thirst sensations to kick in. Just keep sipping water during the race.

Consuming carbohydrate sports drinks might prove beneficial for the races that last for more than one hour (the 21 km and 42 km races).

Wear proper footwear to avoid any foot injury

### **Marathon Shoes**

You don't want to wear brand new shoes on the marathon, but you don't want to wear dead shoes, either. It is best to start your marathon shoes fresh the month before the marathon, break them in at lower distances, and train in them for at least one of your longest walks.

Every item you will wear during the marathon should be worn during your long training days. Do not wear anything new for the marathon.

For road race marathons, a flexible running shoe with moderate support is the best choice for most people.

The best shoe for you is the one that fits **you** best, the one that gives you the proper support, flexibility, cushioning, and compensates for any stride problems you may have, such as overpronation. Each person's feet are different. Take all advice with a grain of salt and find a shoe fitting expert to help you find the shoe that is best for your walking distance, speed, style, and surface as well as your weight and stride.

Essential Walking Shoe Qualities:

**Flexible:** You must be able to bend and twist the shoes. When you take a walking step, your foot will flex as you roll through a step from heel to toe. If the shoe is too stiff, your foot will fight it with each step.

**Flat heel:** Walking shoes should have a relatively flat heel.