

# Training for a Marathon: An Basic Guide



Following is an introductory beginner's guide for those who are new to marathon running. Please note that this is a general guide only and must not be taken as professional advice.

## Getting Started

Be aware of your limits. Doing a 42 km marathon puts you at a higher risk of injury than your normal daily runs. Ensure you consult with your health care professionals before starting on any training program.

### start early

One of the most common causes of injury is running too many kilometres too soon, too fast. So don't underestimate the importance of consistently running at least 30 – 40 km a week regularly before committing to training for a marathon.

### start small

Running a few shorter races – 5 km, 10 km, and half marathons is an excellent way to prepare physically and mentally for a marathon.

## The Four Building Blocks of Marathon Training

- **Base Kilometres:** Build your weekly kms over time, running 3 – 5 times per week.
- **The Long Run:** Do a long run every 7-10 days. This lets your body adjust gradually to longer distances.
- **Speed Work:** Practice Intervals and tempo runs to increase your cardio capacity.
- **Rest & Recovery:** Adequate rest helps prevent injuries and mental burnout.



### base kilometres

Most marathon training plans range from 12-20 weeks. Beginning marathoners should aim to build their weekly kilometres up to 80 kilometres over the 4 months leading up to the marathon.

3 – 5 runs per week is good. The vast majority of these runs should be done at a comfortable pace. You should run at an easy enough pace to be able to carry on a conversation.

When building base kilometres, never increase your weekly kilometres by more than 10 percent from week to week.

### the long run

The next step is to build up to a weekly long run. This should be done once every 7-10 days, extending the long run by a few kilometres each week. Every 3 weeks, scale it back by a few kilometres so as not to overtax your body and risk injury.

Doing these runs at a substantially slower pace than usual builds confidence, lets your body adjust to longer distances, and teaches your body to burn fat for fuel.

## maximum distance

Most marathon training plans usually peak at a long run of approximately 30 km. So where do those last few kilometres come from on race day? With proper training, your body will take advantage of the peak shape you are in, the rest you offer it during a tapering period, and the adrenaline of race day.

## speed work

Speed work is an optional element to incorporate into your training program. It can increase your aerobic capacity and make your easy runs feel, easy!

Intervals and tempo runs are the most popular forms of speed work.

- Intervals – are a set of repetitions of a specific, short distance, run at a substantially faster pace than usual, with recovery jobs in between. For example, you might run 4 x 2 km repeats at a hard pace, with 5 minutes of slow jogging or even walking in between the repeats.
- Tempo Runs – are longer than an interval – generally in the range of 7 – 15 kms, depending on where you are in your training, run at a challenging, but sustainable pace. This kind of workout teaches your body, as well as your brain, to sustain challenging work over a longer period of time.

Always allow your body to warm up and cool down with a few easy kilometres at the beginning and end of any speed workout.

## rest and recovery

Rest days mean no running. They let your muscles recover from the workouts and help prevent mental fatigue. The great enemy of any marathon runner is injury, and the best protection against injury is rest and recovery.

If you are itching to do something active on your rest days, doing some cross training is a great option. Can include, walking, hiking, cycling, swimming, yoga, weights or any other activity that isn't as high impact as running.

- Tapering - In the 2 – 3 weeks leading up to your marathon, scale back significantly on overall kilometres and difficulty of your runs to let your body rest up for the event.

## Hydrating and Fuel on the Run

### hydration

All marathons should include water and aid stations along the way.

If you plan to carry some of your own water on race day, buy a hydration pack or belt long in advance and get accustomed to running with it. Never try something new on race day.

While training, you will be doing plenty of long runs without the benefit of aid stations. Several tried and true techniques to consider:

- Carry your own water using a hydration pack or belt, or with handheld bottles.
- Do long runs on a short loop course, so you can stash water in one spot along the way.
- Plot your long run route to pass water fountains.



### fuel

You've probably heard about the phenomenon many marathoners experience during a marathon, commonly called "hitting the wall".

Your body can only store so much glycogen – it's your primary source of energy during a marathon. As this level gets depleted over the course of your marathon, your muscles will begin to tire and feel heavy. While no amount of

fuel consumption during an event can entirely replace your depleted glycogen, consuming small amounts of carbohydrates can help prevent you from hitting the dreaded wall.

Energy gels or chews are the easiest to carry and often easiest to digest – but a few pieces of fruit or an energy bar can also work. For any run over 2 hours, aim to take in about 60 grams of carbs per hour.

As with everything, make sure you test out various types of fuel on your training runs to see what your stomach can tolerate, so you don't have any surprises on race day.

## Event Day Tips

Don't try anything new on race days – no new shoes, new shorts or new shirt. Don't drink 3 cups of coffee if you usually only have 1. Your long training runs are when you should be fine tuning your clothing, gear and fuel & food & hydration strategies.

### before the event

Hydrate well for several days leading up to your marathon. Drink a big glass of water before you go to bed the night before race day. Drink another one first thing in the morning.

Eat a simple, high carb breakfast several hours before the race if possible.

Smear on a little Vaseline in any areas vulnerable to chaffing (these will be discovered on your long training runs).

The temperature is going to rise over the course of the race, so don't overdress.

### during the event

Start slowly. It's easy to get caught up in the adrenaline, but starting too fast is a bit of a mistake. There will be plenty of K's over which to pick up your pace if you are feeling awesome!

Don't blaze by every aid station or try to drink from a cup while running full blast. Either practice drinking while running before race day or just pull over for a few seconds to drink.

## Recovery and Beyond

In the immediate moments after your finish, drink several cups of water or sports drink to nourish your tired muscles. Walk a little, if you can, to let those muscles cool down. Do gentle stretching. Eat some simple carbs, whether you feel like it or not.

Try to get plenty of rest and sleep. Eat well-balanced meals. Take care of any injuries or ailments you may sustain during the events. Nourish your immune system.

