

**TRAINING FOR YOUR FIRST MARATHON**  
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Who should run a marathon? People shouldn't run marathons unless they have an overt desire to do so. In my practice of cardiology and as a long time runner, I have never suggested to people that they run marathons. If I am asked by a person, "Am I able to run a marathon?" I give them guidance to be sure they will be able to complete a safe marathon.

Marathoning not only requires significant physical abilities, but also significant emotional strength. It taxes the body as well as the mind. Adolescents and younger individuals should stay away. No one should attempt a marathon unless they have been running at least 25 miles per week for some time. I would suggest at least 6 months to one year.

Runners greater than 35 years of age and those who have significant risk factors for heart disease, namely elevated cholesterol, elevated blood pressure, past medical history of smoking, family history of coronary artery disease, or diabetes mellitus should not only be evaluated by a physician, but also should have exercise stress testing. This should be done prior to the rigorous training that is required.

Coronary artery disease is the most frequent cause of death in athletes greater than 35 years of age. The most frequent cause of death in athletes less than 35 is congenital abnormalities and this can be evaluated by a good physical examination and an electrocardiogram. At times, other testing, such as echocardiography and stress testing may be necessary. Anyone with a family history of sudden death or with symptoms of chest discomfort, light headedness, dizziness or passing out should be evaluated by a physician before training for a marathon. Any individual with significant respiratory conditions, predominantly asthma or exercise-induced asthma, should be evaluated by a physician before entering such stress.

Pregnant women may run, but should keep their miles low. They should avoid marathons and dehydration. Later in pregnancy walking is safe.

During marathoning, significant, but rare problems can occur: stomach bleeding, kidney failure and significant fever reactions. I therefore would urge any individual with underlying gastrointestinal or kidney problems to be evaluated by their doctor.

Individuals who have significant bone problems or bleeding abnormalities should also be evaluated because of the repeated impacts of the run.

In addition, anyone taking any allergy, respiratory, heart or blood pressure medications on a regular basis should have that medicine evaluated by their physician. Antidepressants or other psychotropic drugs should be evaluated.

If this hasn't weakened your spirits and you are one of those few brave people who want to continue, then I have the following tips for you in running and preparing for a marathon.

I would like to suggest the following training program. This should provide a guide for 3 months before the marathon. (See chart.)

Basically, the runner enters week one at 26 miles and then subsequently over the 4<sup>th</sup> week builds to 36 miles. During the week try to keep your long runs on the same day. Keep them on the day that the marathon is going to occur because you want to start building habits and have your body in tune to be ready for long runs. If possible, try to do at least some long runs on the same day as the race. Don't be a fanatic about the schedule but use it as a guide.

By week 5 you are at 38 miles, by week 8, 51 miles, by week 10 and 11 you are at 61 and 65 miles, and then subsequently by week 12 you are at 19 and 21 miles until the race occurs. This is a cool-down period. I run up until the Saturday before the race. On Saturday I take a walk. I get up very early in order to sleep well that night. I don't suggest resting for two days. Keep your tone up and hit your peak Sunday morning.

It is very difficult for people who work for a living to run these miles. Personally I cannot put my miles above 45 to 50 miles per week. (My best marathon is approximately 3 hours and 56 minutes.) You need to have your miles at least in the 40s one month before the marathon.

I guarantee if you use this program as a general guide you will be able to run your first marathon in approximately 4 ½ hours.

There is no other way to run a marathon safely than to train and prepare for it. During your marathon training and during the marathon, you will experience significant emotional highs and lows. I have been exhilarated during some marathons and others I have been crying at the finish line. I had to testify in front of Pittsburgh's City Council on behalf of the Pittsburgh Marathon. The religious leaders of the city did not want the race run on a Sunday. I mentioned that marathoning is sometimes a very religious experience. I have done some of my best praying between miles 22 and 26! The runners appreciated this. The clergy did not respond.

During your runs you need to develop mental toughness. You must push yourself, particularly when you start getting into your major runs. This mental training will be helpful for miles 20 through 26.

One to 2 weeks before the marathon you should do a long run 20 to 22 miles. However, in the subsequent week I would not go above 12 to 14 miles. The running schedule should serve only as a guide. There is no magic to it. You can create your own, but there is no trade off for the total miles.

What other tips can I give for running a marathon?

The marathon is going to be in the streets. Run close to the middle of the road. Run on the part of the road that is flat. Most of the time you are training either on a track, on trails, or running on sidewalks and streets. Stay in the same area that you normally run in order to keep the same gait and force distributed throughout your body.

Maintain the same habits. The fluid you practice drinking while you are training is the one you should use during the race. Don't automatically switch to a Gatorade-like agent or a body or energy fluid when you have never tasted it before. It may cause significant problems with gastric emptying, nausea, etc.

Run the marathon in the same clothes you train in. We all have our favorite running gear. Wear the same gear the day of the race. Don't change your style. Remember who you are.

Dress appropriately the day of the race. The one factor you cannot control during a marathon is the weather. It may be very hot, very cold, rain, or possibly snow, depending on the time of year. Be prepared. If necessary wear a plastic bag or rain suit while you are standing in line. There is nothing worse than waiting for a marathon to begin in cold weather and rain. You can't move and you tighten. You can always take clothes off during the race.

Stretch just before the race in the same manner as you normally do.

Wear running shoes that you are comfortable with and that you have been running in at least 3 to 4 weeks before the race. Tie your shoes carefully with double knots. (Sounds simple, but don't forget it !!)

During your training take at least one day off per week because you don't want to get into the "over exercise syndrome". This will cause excessive fatigue, lethargy, moodiness, and depression. This will hurt you mentally and decrease your immunity exposing you to infections and injuries. A bad viral illness can set you back 1-2 weeks.

What about diet? Many of the suggestions regarding diet and fluid training have not been studied scientifically. There have been different thoughts about carbohydrate loading, before and during marathons. There is no hard data to support carbohydrate loading, but during this major exercise training you should eat a little heavier than normal to keep your weight up. Then days before the marathon I generally will eat more carbohydrates than usual. The evening before the marathon I eat a normal pasta meal. I don't overdose or overeat because I want to feel the same way I feel during the week, particularly the morning of the race.

What should one eat the morning of the race? Try to avoid high-sugar containing food. Generally try to stay with simple carbohydrates. I generally will have a bagel with margarine, no jam. I am not into a big breakfast because I do not want to get sick in the middle of the marathon. Try to eat at least 2 ½ hours before the marathon to permit your self to digest your food properly. If you are going to drink, drink an hour or two before the marathon. When you get to the race course, empty your bladder and move your bowels. You do not want to stand in line with 3 minutes to go before the race and have to urinate or have a bowel movement. You don't want to stop during the race, particularly early, because you don't want to stop your pattern of running and mental thought. In addition, if you are going to drink, drink just before the race and therefore you will probably lose that amount of fluid through sweating.

What about drinking during the race? During your training runs, particularly those runs greater than 10 miles, you should have certain miles where you will be taking in fluid. Take fluid when you are thirsty. Don't over drink. Over hydration can cause serious electrolyte disorders. During training carry water with you or stop at gas stations, water fountains or small restaurants that permit you to have a glass of water. It is important that you get into a water drinking program. There is some controversy regarding the higher sugar fluids, some feel they may decrease gastric emptying and cause cramping. Others believe that sodium and sugar may be helpful. Practice and use what makes you feel good.

Some runners chew gum, eat mints, etc. Use what works well for you. Don't hesitate to take Tylenol. If aspirin doesn't bother your stomach this is acceptable, but try it well before race day to help aches, pains and possible headaches you may develop during the race. Avoid nonsteriodals the day before and the day after the race. This may cause electrolyte disorders.

Many of the things that I have told you are based on individual preference. I have heard many different things and many different esoteric programs from many different people. Listen to yourself and your body. Do what works for you. I basically prefer water. Near miles 18 and 20 I sometimes find myself becoming very hungry and also developing a mild headache. This is most likely hypoglycemia (low sugar). At this time I may take a little bit of sugar containing fluid ("a high energy fluid") and dilute it with some water just to give me the extra kick that I need. Some people will drink Coke and coffee just before the race, but I drink mine approximately 2 ½ hours before the race.

Those of you who are fortunate enough to be training in the same city as the race, run the course. There is no better training than to become familiar with the terrain. Know the course because then, the day of the marathon, it is familiar to you; you have been there before. When you hit mile 13, mile 18, etc., you have been there. Try to hit the different parts of the course during your long runs. The familiarity will only make it easier for you on the day of the marathon.

During your training and during the race, be very careful in temperatures of less than 15 degrees Fahrenheit. At this temperature there is a possibility of cold burns to the lungs. Wear a mask; wear a scarf to cover your nose and mouth. Be very careful in temperatures greater than 85 degrees Fahrenheit with 85% humidity. This is the time when heat problems can occur. Either in cold or hot temperatures, once you start developing headaches, chills or get "goose bumps" stop. These are warning signs.

Be careful of cars, trucks, and bikes while running. Run against traffic. Make sure you know what is coming at you. Unfortunately motorists have tried to hit me and have thrown numerous objects at me. Be careful. If you run at night, have reflective tape or gear on your body. Trauma is the highest cause of death to runners.

Some people like to run alone and contemplate (yours truly). Others need a crowd. Don't change your style. Remember, depend on yourself. When running the marathon, let the crowds yell and scream. The runners who blow horns, ring bells and wear funny costumes will not finish. This is serious business.

Don't let the crowds make you feel you are an Olympic runner. The crowds are wonderful and become significantly needed at mile 18 and onward. Accept their energy and store it. If need be, have friends scattered throughout the course to help you. They will get caught up in it and have a great time.

I have not been able to address all of the issues, but at least I've tried to address those issues that have given me successful marathons. If you follow the above tips and earnestly train, I feel that a 4 hour, 30 minute marathon is an excellent time for those of you who are trying to for the first time. Those who have more time and want to complete marathons in 3 hours and 30 minutes or less, your mileage has to be approximately 60, 70 or more miles, months before the race. These are very dedicated

people at very high levels of activity. I like to think of myself as a “people’s marathoner”, and try to give safe information to those runners who are doing a marathon for the first time.

If it’s in your system, God bless you. Go out there and get it. Once you’ve done it, it’s difficult to get out of your system.

May your force and religion be with you.