

FitFacts™

American Council
on Exercise®

HOW TO TRAIN FOR A MARATHON

The marathon is a 26.2 mile adventure and is seen as the ultimate test of character, discipline, and fitness by many. If you have your sights set on finishing a marathon, take a moment to learn about the basics of training for this exciting endurance event.

Play It Safe

Marathon training is a serious physical challenge; do yourself a favor by checking in with your health care provider before you start training. Detecting and treating problems early is better than getting sidelined by a serious issue down the road.

As you pack on the miles and pick up your pace, stay tuned into your body's signals and symptoms; if something doesn't feel right, trust your instincts and seek medical advice.

A comfortable, sturdy pair of running shoes is essential for successful marathon training; visit a running shoe store for a personalized recommendation.

Building Endurance

Staying power is the name of the game with marathon training. The best way to get better at running longer is to run longer. Find a training plan geared for your level of running experience online, at the library, or book store. Check out the resources listed below.

Most training plans will have you running 3-4 days a week, with a progressively longer run on the weekend. You'll gradually build your weekly mileage and long-run distance, and taper off as race day approaches.

Building Strength

Your legs may already be strong, but you need a strong core and upper body, too. Strength training is essential for total-body fitness, and will help maintain good posture and prevent fatigue during your longer runs. It also helps correct muscle imbalances that can lead to injury.

A basic strength routine that hits all the major muscle groups can be done in 20-30 minutes. You can even do it at home. For best results, schedule a few sessions with a certified fitness professional to learn proper form and technique and ensure that you're on track to meet your strength goals.



Match the Course

Use your race course map to help you plan your training schedule. Prepare for a hilly course by including hill workouts; train on the race course occasionally or find similar hills to run elsewhere. If there's a huge hill at mile 20, practice your hill training after a long run. If the course is flat, train on flat terrain as much as possible. The more you match your race course in training, the better you'll do on race day.

Speed and Tempo Runs

Most experts advise beginning marathoners to focus on finishing the race, not on speed. But once you've built a solid endurance base, you may be interested in improving your running pace. Speed workouts are often done on a track and involve short distance runs at or near your top speed; you can do 200 or 400-meter repeats, for example. Tempo runs are longer-distance workouts done about 15-30 seconds slower than your per-mile race pace, but faster

than your normal training pace. Because speed and tempo sessions are higher-intensity workouts, limit them to once or twice a week.

Rest and Recovery

Your training plan should include adequate time for rest and recovery; allow 24-48 hours to recover after your long run and any high-intensity workouts like speed work or hills. Without enough rest, you run the risk of overtraining, which can seriously interfere with your training plan.

Sports Nutrition

Think you can eat with abandon, just because you're racking up the miles? Think again. For optimal training and performance, learn about sports nutrition. Fueling your training with the right mix of high-quality carbohydrates, fats, and proteins and maintaining a healthy fluid balance is fundamental to marathon success.

Train Together

Marathon training can be a lonely endeavor. Training with others who share your goals is fun, encouraging, and challenging. The power of camaraderie and accountability will keep you showing up for training runs on when you'd rather hit the snooze button. To find a running club, check with a local running store or search online.

Additional Resources

[Hal Higdon's Marathon Training Guide](#) —
Hal Higdon

[Marathon Training](#) — Runner's World

[Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Blog](#) —
Active.com



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