

FULL MARATHON BEGINNER TRAINING GUIDE



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Introduction

Before you begin...

From beginning your training, to lining up at the start and finishing, preparing for and running in the marathon is a fantastic experience that you will never forget. This beginner’s training guide focuses on everything you need to get started, sensible precautions to take and it also contains a week-by-week structured guide that will convert you from complete beginner to a fitter, healthier, successful marathon runner. However, before you start that first training session, take a little time out to check a few safety considerations before you begin.

Safety First

To start with, it is vitally important to ensure that it is safe for you to begin an exercise programme. Complete the safety checklist below and if you answer YES to one or more questions, or alternatively, if you are at all concerned about starting training, then make an appointment with your doctor for a check-up before you start.



Health-status safety checklist

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Are you aged over 30 and/or have not exercised for some time? | Y | N |
| 2 | Do you suffer from any medical conditions? | Y | N |
| 3 | Are you a smoker or have recently given up smoking? | Y | N |
| 4 | Have you undergone any surgery in the past two years? | Y | N |
| 5 | Are you suffering from any injuries? | Y | N |
| 6 | Are you currently on any prescribed medication? | Y | N |
| 7 | Are you unsure about beginning an exercise program? | Y | N |

Once you have the all-clear from your doctor then you're ready to start training.

The Marathon

The marathon is one of life’s great challenges – and open to all! There are numerous marathon events all over the world and most international cities stage marathons. Whichever event you choose, stepping up to the challenge of training for and completing 26.2 miles is an incredible experience that you will never forget. Completing a marathon is a magnificent achievement wherever you finish in the field and this training guide takes you through from novice

runner to race-day competitor.

Getting Started

What gear do I need?

To get started you need minimal equipment. Running is a very simple sport and requires very little specialist kit. The most important point is that you have suitable clothing (particularly footwear) and that you feel comfortable in everything. The most technical and most important things you need to buy are your running shoes.

Shoes

Correct footwear is one area where you should not compromise. Good running shoes are an investment in comfort, protection and injury prevention and it is worth visiting a specialist sports footwear retailer rather than a chain store and discussing your requirements with them. A specialist retailer with gait analysis and pressure plate testing will be able to assess your requirements and recommend suitable shoes for your particular gait and running style.



Insight

You want to be comfortable when you run so finding the correct shoe size is very important. When you shop for running shoes, always go in the afternoon because after lunch, your feet will have expanded a little.

Socks

Working upwards from the shoes, next you need some socks. These can be simple sports socks that can be picked up from most sports stores. However, if you get more serious about your running, it is wise to invest in some socks that have been specifically designed for running. These have been designed to wick away moisture and sweat from the foot so you don't slip and consequently suffer from blisters. Additionally, these types of socks are designed with more padding in certain areas for enhanced cushioning.



The most advanced socks are designed for the appropriate foot i.e. they are left and right foot specific. The specific foot socks have a great benefit in that they hug the foot better and there is no excess sock floating around in the shoe which may cause blisters.

Insight

Buy your socks before you buy your shoes. Socks come in a wide range of thicknesses, which can significantly affect the fit of your running shoes. Take the socks that you are going to train in along to the shoe retailer so that you get a perfect match.

Shorts and tights

After socks come shorts or when it is colder, tights. Shorts should be comfortable, lightweight and have the ability to wick away sweat when you train. Shorts come with just elastic waist bands or a draw string as well. It is worth getting a draw string as you can tie the shorts to get the perfect fit.

Elastic-only shorts often move down a little, especially in wet conditions. Your shorts shouldn't be so tight that they cut off circulation round your waist but conversely they shouldn't be so loose that they flap around all the time either..

When the weather is colder it is advisable to wear tights to keep your legs warmer and thus reduce the chance of injury. Running tights hug the legs more efficiently and stop the wind and rain affecting the leg itself. This helps in reducing injuries from cold muscles and also means that you can enjoy running when the weather is a little worse than ideal.

Your tights should be snug fitting and comfortable. It is important to try them on before you buy because many manufacturers have different cuts to suit different styles of runner.



Running tops

Running T-shirts should be reasonably tight but not figure-hugging and likewise they shouldn't flap around when you run in them. It is a fine balance between well fitted and slightly baggy that you should aim for. With long-sleeve T-shirts, you should aim to get ones with cuffed sleeves so they stay down around your wrists. If there are no cuffs then the sleeves often ride up your arms when you run and this can be both annoying and cold.

The mid to top range T-shirts all wick away sweat to keep you cooler and allow a greater air circulation through the fabric. They feel very lightweight but have the properties to keep you warm or cool depending on when and how you wear them. For hot weather singlets are the perfect option, but still go for wicking fabrics that also help air circulate around your body to aid cooling.

When the weather gets really cold or wet it is advisable to run in a long-sleeve waterproof top. These offer excellent wind-stopping and rain-resistance capabilities and can keep you warm and dry throughout any run. Sleeveless jackets are ideal for slightly warmer climates while full long-sleeve waterproofs are better for colder and wetter climates. Cheaper versions will be fine for most running conditions but they will sacrifice certain aspects like being 100% waterproof or windproof. Being prepared for cooler conditions enables you to stay warm, dry and enjoy the run more. In warmer climates wicking fabrics enable you to train harder by staying cooler and wicking away sweat and moisture from the body.



Gloves

These should be lightweight and comfortable. Only in extreme weather will you need to wear thick running gloves and more often than not you will heat up enough to be okay in the normal thin type. Woollen gloves are the norm because they are cheap to buy, but they don't offer the same waterproof and wind-stopper capabilities of synthetic fabrics. Woollen gloves will be fine for most runners but if you are venturing out into colder or wetter climates, it is worth investing in a more advanced pair. Running with cold hands can ruin the experience for you, so choose carefully when you buy, especially if it is near wintertime.



Hats

Hats are similar to gloves in that woollen ones are the norm because they are easy to get hold of and are cheap. Fleece materials offer wind-stopping capabilities and some are waterproof as well. Caps offer greater protection from the rain, snow and sun but often they can get blown off in windy conditions. They don't offer the same warmth capabilities as woollen/synthetic fabrics but they are good when you need better protection from the elements. In addition, they are better for runners who wear glasses because they help the glasses from getting rain or snow on.



Sports bras

It is important to wear a sports bra that fits you snugly and gives adequate support for running. Everyone is different and you may well need to try on a few different products before finding what is just right for you.

So does your sports bra fit?

- Your bra should fit snugly without being uncomfortably tight
- The bra should fit without any bulges around the sides
- The shoulder straps should not dig in (wider straps can be more comfortable)
- When you run there should be significantly less bounce than with a normal bra



There are many excellent bras on the market, which come in a large range of sizes and colours offering every different level of support. Most women should only need to wear one sports bra even for high impact activities.

Structuring your training sessions

Following correct exercise protocols is key to getting the most out of your training, so that you start out on the road to fitness with safe and correctly balanced training sessions. To get the most out of your training, you should adhere to the following sequence each time you train:

Warm Up

The warm up raises the heart rate, gets blood flowing to the working muscles and prepares the body for exercise. It should be for a minimum of five minutes and replicate the movements or activities of the main session.

For example: when beginning a run, five minutes very easy jogging will prime the body for the main training session.

Mobility

Some basic actions to put the limbs through the range of movement that the main session requires will ensure that the joints are loosened up, lubricated and will function more efficiently.



Main Session

This will form the bulk of the training session. For example: a brisk 10-minute run.

Cool Down

The cool down should be at a lower intensity than the main session and should bring the body temperature and heart rate closer to pre-exercise levels. Waste by-products of exercise will be flushed from the muscles and tissues, accelerating recovery before the next training session.

For example: the cool-down should be a minimum of five to 10 minutes light CV. Jogging or walking is ideal.

Flexibility

Stretching exercises should be carried out after the main session and cool-down as the body is in a greater state of relaxation than at the beginning of the session. Five to 10 minutes spent stretching the muscles worked will maintain suppleness.

How to Stretch

To get the most out of your post exercise stretching session, simply follow the step-by-step guide below:

Relax

It is very important to be relaxed. Physical and mental tension will inhibit your range of movement and prevent your muscles from stretching as effectively. Hence, you will not achieve maximum flexibility benefits.

Ease into the stretch

Gradually move your body or the limb being stretched into the stretch position. Once you feel slight tension in the muscle, (known as the point of bind), which is the limit of the muscle's flexibility, hold the position. Avoid bouncing or any other movements, which could overstretch the muscle and result in injury.

Relax your breathing

Always keep your breathing easy and relaxed because that will reduce all-round muscular tension, which in turn will allow you to stretch further. Holding your breath will tense up your entire body, making stretching much harder.

Hold for 30 seconds

To get maximum stretching benefits, you need to hold the stretch for a minimum of 30 seconds. Stretching each muscle for just a few seconds brings no flexibility benefits.

Pain means no gain

Stretching should invoke a mild feeling of 'tightness' or tension within the stretched muscle. Pain when stretching indicates injury or a muscle that has been overstretched. Therefore, never stretch beyond a 'comfortable tightness'.

Rest and repeat

A single stretch for each muscle is very beneficial but if time permits, carry out two stretches for each muscle, separated by a short break of 30 seconds. The second stretch will help extend your range of movement further.

Frequency

Ideally stretch the major muscles after every run but if that proves too time-consuming, stretching twice a week is a suitable target..



Additional Training

Obviously running will form the core of all your training because you are training to condition your body to complete 26.2 miles under your own steam. However, it is also beneficial to incorporate other types of training in your programme, so that you to the start line in the best possible shape.

Flexibility training

There are a multitude of flexibility exercises for stretching every muscle in the body. Primarily, you need to focus on leg stretches to keep your muscles long, supple and injury free. The key is to ensure that the muscles that have been utilised during your workout are stretched at the end of the training session.

For example: at the end of your run and cool down, spend a few minutes stretching the hamstrings, quadriceps, calves and adductors.



Cross Training

Cross-training is the name given to other forms of training that complement your running training. Cross-training can be extremely beneficial because it allows your body to recover from a run whilst still providing training benefits. Running is a very repetitive activity that if not carried out correctly, can lead to overuse injuries. By occasionally adding different activities to your programme, you keep fresh and significantly reduce any injury risk.

For example: the day after a long endurance training run, a light swimming session or bike ride will still provide cardiovascular benefits but without the same loading on muscles that have been fatigued from running.



Resistance training (weight training)

Resistance training is extremely beneficial to complement your running; strengthening all around the body and correcting any muscle imbalances. The range of resistance training exercises for training specific muscles is immense, and can enhance your running performance through improved posture and all-round strength.

Specific resistance training sessions are not included in this programme because as a new marathon runner it is important to focus as much as possible on building your endurance base for the challenge of running 26.2 miles. If you find that you have time to add in some resistance sessions to your training week, one to two workouts per week is ample.



Beginner Marathon Training Guide

Program notes

The guide is broken down into two training schedules.

Schedule 1

This is an eight-week 'lead-in' schedule that will prepare you for the main training guide. Use this schedule if you are completely new to exercise/running. Schedule 1 culminates in a 10k event, which is an ideal target for you to focus on.

Schedule 2

This is the main 16-week training schedule that will take you through to race day. Use this schedule if you have already done some running training.

For each session in the programmes, follow the protocols for warm up, mobility main session, cool down and flexibility outlined earlier. Completely new exercisers should start at week one but if you have been doing some training, you can jump in at a later week. Simply check the week-by-week chart to see which week best matches your current activity levels and then start at that point.

There is flexibility within the programme for switching training sessions around during the week to fit in with your other commitments such as work, home, family etc. The key point is to ensure that your training is balanced each week, including flexibility, CV (running) and rest.

Insight

Don't be a slave to the guide! The training program is designed with rest days, recovery sessions and lower volume weeks. This will ensure your body has time to adapt to the training. However, everyone is different and if you feel that an extra day's rest will be beneficial to your training, simply take out one of the shorter sessions in that week.

If you find it difficult to complete some weeks due to lack of training time, always try to complete the long run sessions. The most important factor with training for the marathon is to build endurance so try to complete all the long runs.

Training pace guide

Use the pace guide below to monitor the intensity of your training throughout each stage of the 16-week guide

Intensity index: **1=incredibly easy, 10= incredibly hard**

| Type of training run | Intensity | Description |
|----------------------|-----------|--|
| Super slow | 2 | Really, really, slow; so easy it hardly seems worth putting your gear on |
| Easy jog | 3 | No pressure, just loosening up or a recovery run |
| Jog | 4 | Still an easy pace but a little faster than an easy jog |
| Comfortable | 5 | You can talk easily to your training partner and keep the pace going |

| | | |
|--------|---|---|
| Steady | 6 | Even paced run, can chat in short sentences |
|--------|---|---|

Schedule 1: Building up to the main marathon

| Week No.1 | First Steps | |
|-----------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | Easy 15-20 mins jog | Take walking breaks if necessary |
| Tues | Rest | |
| Wed | Easy 15-20 mins jog | Take walking breaks if necessary |
| Thurs | Rest | |
| Fri | Easy 20 mins jog | Take walking breaks if necessary |
| Sat | Rest | |
| Sun | 25 mins walk / jog | Take it very easy |

| Week No.2 | Consolidate | |
|-----------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | Rest | Recovery from Sunday's longer session |
| Tues | 20 mins jog | |
| Wed | Rest | |
| Thurs | 20-25 mins jog | |
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | Rest | |
| Sun | 25-30 mins walk / jog | |

| Week No.3 | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | Rest | |
| Tues | 25 mins jog | |
| Wed | Rest | |
| Thurs | 30 mins jog | |
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | Rest | |
| Sun | 35 mins non-stop run/jog | Try and make it continuous |

| | | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Week No.4 | Moving up | |
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | 15 mins very easy recovery jog | Leave the stopwatch at home! |
| Tues | 25 mins steady | |
| Wed | Rest | |
| Thurs | 25 mins steady | |
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | Rest | |
| Sun | 35 mins non-stop run/jog | Repeat of last Sunday, improve on time if possible |

| | | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Week No.5 | | |
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | 15 mins very easy recovery jog | Recovery session |
| Tues | Rest | |
| Wed | 25-30 mins steady pace | |
| Thurs | Rest | |
| Fri | 25 mins easy | |
| Sat | Rest | |
| Sun | 40-45 mins jog/walk | Take walking breaks as necessary |

| | | |
|--------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Week No.6 | | |
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | 20 mins recovery jog | Easy pace |
| Tues | 25-30 mins steady | |
| Wed | Rest | |
| Thurs | 35 mins steady | |
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | Rest | |
| Sun | 40-45 mins | Try to jog/run non-stop |

| | | |
|-----------|--|--|
| Week No.7 | | |
|-----------|--|--|

| Day | Training | Training notes |
|-------|-----------------------|--|
| Mon | 20 mins recovery jog | Easy pace |
| Tues | 25-30 mins steady | Big week, 5 runs |
| Wed | Rest | |
| Thurs | 35-40 mins steady | |
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | 10 mins very easy jog | Only jogging |
| Sun | 1 hour steady | Don't push pace; take walking breaks if you feel like it |

| Week No.8 | Taper week and lead-in 10K race | |
|-----------|--|-------------------|
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | Rest | |
| Tues | 25-30 mins steady | |
| Wed | Rest | |
| Thurs | 25-30 mins easy | |
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | 10 mins very easy jog | |
| Sun | 10K race + walking warm-up and cool-down | Take it very easy |

Schedule 2: Marathon training

| Week No.1 | Building up | |
|-----------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | 25 mins jog | Just jogging, very light |
| Tues | 40 mins steady | |
| Wed | Rest | |
| Thurs | 35-40 mins steady | |
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | 15 mins very easy | |
| Sun | 75 mins easy run | Take walking breaks if needed |

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Week No.2 | |
|-----------|--|

| Day | Training | Training notes |
|-------|--------------------------|---|
| Mon | Rest | |
| Tues | 40 mins steady | |
| Wed | Rest | |
| Thurs | 50 mins comfortable pace | |
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | 15 mins very easy | |
| Sun | 75 mins run | Repeat last Sunday's session with fewer walking breaks, warm-up and cool-down |

| Week No.3 | | |
|-----------|------------------------------------|----------------|
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | 20 mins recovery jog | |
| Tues | 40 mins steady | |
| Wed | Rest | |
| Thurs | 50 mins | |
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | Rest | |
| Sun | 80-90 mins jog with walking breaks | |

| Week No.4 | | |
|-----------|----------------------|--|
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | 20 mins recovery run | |
| Tues | 40 mins steady | |
| Wed | Rest | |
| Thurs | Rest | Double rest before brisk run |
| Fri | 40 mins brisk pace | |
| Sat | Rest | |
| Sun | 90-100 mins slow | Very, very easy. Take a drink with you |

| Week No.5 | Gradually building towards half marathon | |
|-----------|--|---------------------------|
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | Rest | Day off after long effort |

| | | |
|--------------|-------------------|--|
| Tues | 50 mins steady | |
| Wed | Rest | |
| Thurs | 40 mins steady | |
| Fri | 20 mins steady | |
| Sat | Rest | |
| Sun | 100-110 mins easy | |

| | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Week No.6 | | |
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | Rest | |
| Tues | 20 mins steady | |
| Wed | 65 mins steady | |
| Thurs | Rest | |
| Fri | 40 mins | |
| Sat | Rest | |
| Sun | 120 mins taken very easy | Slow with drinks |

| | | |
|--------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Week No.7 | Taper week and half marathon race | |
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | Rest | |
| Tues | 30-35 mins steady | |
| Wed | 30 mins steady | |
| Thurs | Rest | |
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | 10 mins jog | Really slow, just to keep loose |
| Sun | Half marathon (13.1 miles) and walk warm-up and cool-down | Slow all the way, just a training run |

| | | |
|--------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Week No.8 | Start of peak mileage phase | |
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | 10-20 mins recovery session | Really slow |
| Tues | Rest | |
| Wed | 30 mins steady | |
| Thurs | 60 mins brisk | |

| | | |
|------------|---------------------------|--|
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | 30 mins jog | |
| Sun | 120 mins comfortable pace | |

| | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Week No.9 | Building long endurance runs | |
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | 30 mins easy | |
| Tues | Rest | |
| Wed | 60 mins brisk | Try to improve on last week's 60 mins distance |
| Thurs | Rest | |
| Fri | 40 mins steady | |
| Sat | Rest | |
| Sun | 130-140 mins taken very easy | Long, slow, run with drinks |

| | | |
|--------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Week No.10 | | |
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | Rest | Recovery after Sunday's long session |
| Tues | 40 mins steady | |
| Wed | Rest | |
| Thurs | 75 mins comfortable pace | |
| Fri | 20 mins jog | |
| Sat | Rest | Really slow, just to keep loose |
| Sun | 140-150 mins taken very easy | Long and slow |

| | | |
|--------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Week No.11 | | |
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | 10-20 mins recovery session | |
| Tues | 40 mins steady | |
| Wed | Rest | |
| Thurs | 75 mins | |
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | 30 mins easy pace | |
| Sun | 150-160 mins comfortable | |

| Week No.12 | | |
|------------|---------------|--|
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | 30 mins easy | |
| Tues | Rest | |
| Wed | 50 mins fast | Home time-trial! |
| Thurs | Rest | |
| Fri | 50 mins easy | Avoid the temptation to run at the pace of Wednesday's session |
| Sat | Rest | |
| Sun | 180 mins slow | Start slowly, take drinks |

| Week No.13 | Peak Week | |
|------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | 20 mins jog recovery | |
| Tues | 40 mins brisk pace | |
| Wed | Rest | |
| Thurs | 60 mins steady | |
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | Rest | Prepare for last big run |
| Sun | 200 mins slow | Last long run, be economical |

| Week No.14 | Start of race taper | |
|------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | 20 mins slow jog or rest if tired | |
| Tues | 30 mins brisk | |
| Wed | Rest | |
| Thurs | 50 mins steady | |
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | Rest | |
| Sun | 120 mins steady | |

| Week No.15 | Further tapering | |
|------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | 20 mins easy | |

| | | |
|--------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Tues | Rest | |
| Wed | 40 mins easy | |
| Thurs | Rest | |
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | 10 mins jog | |
| Sun | 70 mins easy in race kit and shoes | Slower than race pace |

| | | |
|--------------|---|-----------------------|
| Week No.16 | Final taper and preparation week | |
| Day | Training | Training notes |
| Mon | 30 mins jog | |
| Tues | Rest | |
| Wed | 20 mins jog | |
| Thurs | Rest | |
| Fri | Rest | |
| Sat | 10 mins very, very easy jog | Keep it slow |
| Sun | Race day! | THE RACE! |

Conclusion

Well done!

You have come to the end of the schedule, and your fitness has improved dramatically from little or no cardiovascular (CV) activity, to being able to complete a marathon. You will have made significant health and fitness gains, and equally importantly, you have progressed safely. By maintaining your training, you will be making a major contribution to your long-term health and fitness, and this schedule can also serve as a foundation and springboard to increase your fitness levels further. Now you've completed your race, you may be tempted to step up and try to improve your finishing time. Enjoy your training.



Disclaimer

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