



Running to and from work can help you nail the mileage in your training plan without it interfering too much in your day-to-day life.

Guide to running your first marathon

Whether it's for charity, to prove to yourself that you can do it, or just for fun, running your first marathon is a huge milestone. We're here with all of the information you need in preparation for running your first marathon

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Finding a good training plan

Your first port of call should be finding a great training plan that suits you and your goals. One of the most popular places to find marathon training plans is Hal Higdon's website. An American writer and marathon runner, Hal has written over 30 best-selling marathon training books and guides and has contributed to Runner's World longer than any other writer. His training plans cover something for everyone from the beginner to the intermediate to the advanced. For your first marathon, it's recommended to go for one of the beginner training plans.

If you've entered a spring marathon you could be training in bleak, wintry conditions. Try to stay focused and positive!



Entering your first marathon

Due to the strict and often difficult entry processes of the World Marathon Majors, it may be an idea to run your first marathon somewhere that allows simple paid entries. Unless you are willing to take on the stress of raising a huge amount of money alongside the gruelling training, there are plenty of marathons out there that are perfect for your first marathon.

Three such popular marathons in the UK and Europe are Brighton marathon in East Sussex, UK, Paris marathon in France, and Edinburgh marathon in Scotland. Each of these races simply require you to pay the entry fee and you're in. They are equally well organised with fantastic routes in beautiful cities and still benefit from overwhelming positive support at the sidelines. It's certainly worth considering a less famous marathon to be your first.

What is a good time to run a marathon?

Finding the right pace for you is hugely important for your first marathon, but don't try to achieve an unrealistic time. Everyone is different and a good time for your marathon will depend entirely on your age, gender, body weight, how long you've been running, and your ultimate goals. Are you just running to have fun and enjoy the experience or are you competitive and looking to run as fast as possible? As this is your first marathon, you don't yet have a personal best time to try and beat, but having a goal in mind is a great motivator.

Of course, Good-For-Age times are an excellent indicator of just that: what is a good marathon time for your age. However, so long as you enjoy yourself and get out of it what you wanted, your time really is irrelevant.

That said, it's important to train enough that you can run a sensible pace and not end up on your feet for too long. Putting your body under that much strain can be pretty dangerous and you want to be able to put up a good fight rather than having to walk most of the course. After all, the quicker you run the quicker it will be over!

Training for your first marathon

The most important factor in your success of running a marathon is your training. Whether you're a



Strength training at the gym or at home (try YouTube for workout inspiration) is essential to stay strong and avoid injury.

YOU MUST REMAIN DEDICATED OVER SEVERAL MONTHS AND PUT IN THE TIME TO TRAIN

Many people who have run a spring marathon say that training through the winter is the toughest part. Dark evening runs after work and cold early morning starts can make motivation difficult, but if you keep your goals in mind and stay dedicated you will be able to enjoy working out and stay motivated.

Nutrition and hydration

Any marathon runner will tell you that you could put in endless miles and countless training hours but it will all be for nothing if you don't crack your hydration and nutrition strategy. As we saw in London in 2018 when a woman fell into a coma after crossing the finish line, hydrating with only water can be potentially dangerous and it's important to replenish your electrolytes and sodium as well.

Drinking a sports drink and taking sodium supplements will combat this easily so make sure they are a part of your hydration and nutrition strategy. It's also important to be able to adjust your strategy for the weather on race day, as you could have been training in sub-zero temperatures but will need more water than you think on an unseasonably hot April day.

Finding what works for you

There is no one-size-fits-all hydration and nutrition plan; you will have to devise your own. Some people are fine with a few litres of water and some energy gels while others find that fuelling with real food is much more effective. You can even make your own energy gels and bars for endurance training so that you know exactly what's gone into them; especially effective for those with a sensitive stomach or a food intolerance.

Make sure you trial different things in your training to find what works for you so that there are no surprises on race day. It's also important to be as self-sufficient as possible once you have found what works for you, as not all races will have what you need at the aid stations.

complete beginner to exercise or you've run up to half marathon distance, running a full marathon is a completely different experience and requires full dedication as well as knowledge on nutrition and hydration.

Fitting training around work and home life

Before you commit to running a marathon, it's important to know that you must remain dedicated over several months and put in the time to train. This means your social life will likely suffer and you may need to give up things like alcohol and tighten up your diet. Speak with your family and friends about your intentions to make sure they are on board as their support could be invaluable to your success.

You also need to make sure you have the time to fit training around your work life. There are plenty of ways to fit training into your daily routine, such as running early in the morning before work, working out at work (such as at lunchtime), and incorporating training into your commute. Explore these avenues and find out what is going to work best for you.

Winter training

Many of the popular UK and European marathons take place in spring time, meaning you will be training over winter. This comes with its own perils such as unexpected snowfall and freezing temperatures. Make sure you have the right activewear for winter running as this will make winter training more bearable. Your essentials should be a long sleeved training top with temperature control to keep you warm without overheating and a water resistant running jacket and gloves to protect you against the elements.

CROSS TRAINING FOR RUNNERS

Once you have your training plan in place, you need to make sure you are also doing effective cross training. Putting in a lot of miles is a given for marathon training, but in order to avoid injury and perform at your best you will also need to cross train.

Cross training for runners is any other type of training apart from running that will supplement and enhance your training. Some of the best types of cross training are strength training at the gym, swimming, and cycling. All of these are low impact sports which will give your joints a chance to rest after pounding the pavements for hours on end while simultaneously working your muscles and increasing your power and strength, all necessary for putting in a good performance on race day.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT YOUR FIRST MARATHON

As the big day draws near it is completely natural to start to feel nervous. You will be wanting to know what to expect at your first marathon so that it doesn't come as much of a shock. Here are some of the most common things you're likely to experience:

LONG TOILET QUEUES

If you've done a lot of races you'll already know the frustrations of a couple of portable toilets trying to accommodate thousands of runners and this won't be any different at a major

marathon. The key is to join the queue early and be patient. So long as you get there with plenty of time, you won't miss the start and the time you spend in the queue would just be time spent pacing back and forth in your starting pen anyway. A top tip is to take a small amount of toilet paper with you as there probably won't be any by the time you get to the front of the queue.

A BUSY START

The start of a marathon with thousands of runners is always going to be busy and

it may take a while to cross the start line. At this point you will be feeling pretty anxious and nervous but also very excited. Take this time to make sure you have everything you need and in place ready to run. Make sure your running watch is ready to go and switch it on early to make sure it can find a GPS signal among all the people.

SETTING OFF TOO FAST

All the excitement of the start may well cause you to set off too fast. Stick to your pacing plan and keep an eye on your watch to help you

stay on track. Don't be tempted to rush off with everyone else; keep calm and start sensibly so that you can enjoy the race.

HITTING THE WALL

This is one of the most common fears among marathon runners and for good reason. Hitting the wall can take the form of anything from feeling a little lightheaded to physically not being able to move. The key to not hitting the wall when running is to stick to your nutrition and hydration strategy and to stay as

hydrated as possible.

READ RACE REPORTS

If you want to be well prepared on what to expect for the particular marathon you are running, it's a great idea to read race reports from people who have been there, done it, and got the t-shirt.

EXPERIENCING THE BEST DAY OF YOUR LIFE

Even if you're hobbling along with sore feet, painful joints, and no energy, when you hit that finish line it will all be forgotten and you will remember this as one of the best days of your life. Running

a marathon is a huge accomplishment and all of the long training sessions, dedication, and compromise will be worth it when you cross that line. The elation you feel will be like nothing else.

GETTING TO THE START LINE UNINJURED

One thing you will hear from a lot of people training for a marathon, whether it's their first or their 10th, is that getting to the start line uninjured is a big deal. It can be all too easy to over-train and end up with an injury that hinders your chances of

performing at your best or even running at all. Some of the most common running injuries are caused by pushing yourself too hard and doing too much too soon, especially if you're new to running.

In order to stay injury-free, always listen to your body during training and don't underestimate the importance of rest. Some of the best ways to deal with running injuries are not to push through the pain; learn from your mistakes, and don't rush your comeback. Rest up and ease back into your training gently. Ideally, you shouldn't get injured at all when training for

a marathon. So long as you eat well, train smart, and listen to your body, you should be good to go.

ORGANISING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Of course, for your big day you will want your family and friends to be there to support you. There's nothing worse than running along wondering where they are and when you'll see them, distracting you from your performance. Before the race, make sure you all agree where they will be standing to watch you so that you know when to expect them.

WHAT TO EAT DURING A MARATHON

Some of the best foods to eat during a long endurance event like a marathon include:

- Protein balls
- Flapjack/Granola
- Peanut butter sandwiches
- Pretzels (good for sodium but can be very dry, especially if you're dehydrated)
- Pickles and pickle juice
- Dried or fresh fruit
- Sugar cubes
- Energy gels
- Sports/electrolyte drink

TOP TIP: If you take on a lot of energy gels and sugary drinks during training, brush your teeth as soon as you get home to protect against cavities and tooth loss due to the excessive sugar consumption. Gels can really make a difference to your training and it's important to stay safe when running in hot weather. Be sure to carry extra water and be flexible with your training. Listen to your body and adjust your speed accordingly, as running at 100% effort in soaring temperatures and blazing sunshine probably won't end well.

FINISH