Tips for Running a Marathon

Most experts agree that if an individual has not run a marathon before DO NOT attempt to run one as your first race. Start with smaller runs. Your first race should be a 5 or 10K before attempting a full marathon of 26.2 miles. Dr. Jeffrey DeLott, a Podiatric Surgeon with Connecticut Orthopaedic Specialists cautions long distance running if not properly trained. "Running a marathon without the adequate training can have significant impact on your body, including stress fractures, severe dehydration and even temporary heart damage." Run 3–4 days a week for 6–12 months before attempting a marathon. Check marathonguide.com for a list of marathons in your area.

Get a physical | A doctor should verify you are in proper health before attempting such a strenuous physical activity to avoid serious injury or death.

Proper running equipment | Making sure you have the proper running shoes can help you avoid foot and leg injuries. Dr DeLott recommends proper evaluation to determine your foot type. “Knowing how your foot functions will influence what category of running shoe is best.” He also recommends investing in technical apparel designed to wick moisture away from your body.

Run/walk strategy | Start your run with a 5-minute warm up walk. For every 1 minute you, walk for 7 minutes. Increase your run times as you get closer to marathon day. Make sure in the beginning you are averaging at least 15 total miles a week. Dr. DeLott also recommends a run/walk strategy for first time marathoners because a walk break allows muscles a chance to recover, creating less fatigue and less post activity soreness promoting a more consistent training program.

Pre/post run eating | Before running eat a 250–300 calorie snack or light meal 1½ or 2 hours before running. Some good examples of what to eat are a bagel with peanut butter, banana, energy bar, or a bowl of cold cereal with a cup of milk. After a run, replenish your body as soon as possible. Eating quickly after runs can help reduce muscle stiffness and joint pain. Your post run diet should consist of carbs and some protein such as protein bars. Other helpful items are a bagel with peanut butter or a fruit or yogurt smoothie. For runs longer than 90 minutes, drink sports drinks instead of water to replenish the sodium loss in your body while running. Dr. DeLott states proper nutrition can help an individual prepare or recover after an intense run to maintain and replenish glycogen stores. It is also critical to hydrate hours before and after long runs.

Running routine | Do not increase the distance you’re running more then 1–2 miles a week. For example, if you run 5 miles per run one week do not run more than 7 miles per run the next week. A month before the marathon you want to be up to 20 miles a run. However, 3 weeks prior to the marathon taper your running back by 80% until the race to make sure your body is properly prepared come marathon day.

Finally, do not push your body beyond what it is capable of | Running to quickly at the beginning will tire you out. If you do so you could injure yourself or not be able to finish. Employ the run/walk strategy for 1st time marathoners. After finishing the marathon make sure you eat properly and hydrate as previously discussed. Also, walk around for at least 10 minutes after finishing in order to avoid blood pooling in your legs. The cool down period is often the most overlooked part of training states Dr. DeLott. “It is extremely important to gradually return your body to a resting state as well as perform post exercise stretches.” Most importantly, HAVE FUN!