

# What's the Best Way to Train for a Marathon?

Plexus Fitness is in the marathon spirit with the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Delaware Marathon Running Festival right around the corner on May 16, 2010. Even though it is a little too late to start training for this upcoming marathon, here are some principles to help you figure out what kind of training works for you!



## 1. Run just enough

"Stay healthy" is the most important piece of marathon training advice, and the most often ignored. It does you no good to train hard, and then get sick or injured. Better to be slightly undertrained, but feeling strong and eager, than to be overtrained. The trick, of course, is finding that fine line between the two.

## 2. Build your training slowly

Increase weekly mileage by just 10 percent per week. Extend long runs by just one mile at a time up to 10 miles, then by two miles at a time if you want. Take recovery weeks as well as recovery days. Here's what eight weeks of marathon training might look like, in terms of miles per week: 20-22-24-20-26-28-30-20.

## 3. Recover, recover, recover

You don't have to train hard seven days a week. You have to train smart three or four days a week. This was proven in a 1994 study at the University of Northern Iowa, where four-time-a-week runners performed just as well in a marathon as those training six times a week and covering 20 percent more total miles. A similar approach is now endorsed by the Furman FIRST marathon program, where 70 percent of veterans have improved their times on three runs a week.

## 4. Do your long runs

This is a no-brainer. The newer you are to marathoning, and the slower, the more important your long runs. You simply have to get accustomed to being on your feet for three, four, or more hours. There's no magic length. Most experts recommend stopping at two and a half to three hours; Jeff Galloway advises going farther, but including walk breaks. All systems work, as long as you get to the starting line healthy and strong.

## 5. Practice your marathon pace

Ann Alyanak, a coach at the University of Dayton, took 10 minutes off her PR at Boston last spring, finishing in 2:38. The key, she believes, was the addition of "progressive marathon-pace" (MP) long runs to her program. Alyanak would do a two-mile warmup, then six miles at marathon pace plus 40 seconds, six more at marathon pace plus 20, and her final six at marathon pace. "I was able to run negative splits in Boston," she says.



## 6. Extend your tempo-run distance

Tempo runs were born as four-mile efforts, propounded by coaching genius Jack Daniels, Ph.D. Then another genius coach, Joe Vigil, Ph.D., began asking Deena Kastor to hold the tempo pace longer--eventually up to 12 miles. He got Meb Keflezighi to 15. Result? Two Olympic Marathon medals. Gradually extend your tempo runs, slowing by a few seconds per mile from your four-mile pace. "The longer the tempo run workout you can sustain, the greater the dividends down the road," says Vigil.

#### **7. Eat your carbs...**

To stay healthy and recover well during marathon training, you need to fuel your body efficiently. First, consume some carbs--gel, sports drink, and so on--during long, hard workouts to keep running strong. Second, eat and/or drink a good helping of carbs as quickly as possible after workouts. This will replenish the glycogen (energy supply) in your depleted leg muscles. Add a little protein for muscle repair.

#### **8. ...and pay attention to iron**

None of the Trials qualifiers in Karp's study identified themselves as "vegetarians." Running increases iron loss through sweating and pounding. You don't have to be a meat-eater to run a strong marathon, but you do have to consume enough iron. Cooking in an iron skillet helps, as does consuming iron-rich foods with vitamin C, which increases the body's iron absorption.

#### **9. Sidestep injuries**

I recently asked exercise physiologist, author, and two-time U.S. Olympic marathoner (1984, 1988) Peter Pfitzinger what he would do differently if he were 22 years old today. He said that he'd rest and/or cross-train for several days a week at the first hint of a problem. And that he'd include core training in his regimen. "I'm convinced that core stability helps runners maintain good running form and pace late in a race," says Pfitzinger, now the CEO of the New Zealand Academy of Sport North.

#### **10. Taper for two to three weeks**

Many runners hate to taper. We are cursed with a sort of sublime obsessiveness--a big help when you're increasing your efforts, but an albatross when you're supposed to be cutting back. A new study from Ball State University showed a particular gain in Type IIa muscle fiber strength--the so-called fast, aerobic muscles that can adapt to improve your performance--after a three-week taper. Of course, as Ryan Hall's experiment shows, you don't have to follow all these principles to run a strong marathon. But the more you cover the basics, the greater your chance of 26.2-mile success.

If you would like more information, check out [www.runnersworld.com](http://www.runnersworld.com)

or

[www.delawaremarathon.org!](http://www.delawaremarathon.org!)