

AFTER THE MARATHON

Whether it is your first or your fiftieth marathon, the feeling is identical when you cross the finish line: exhilaration, which, at some point, gives way to the tired, achy feeling that inevitably comes from logging more than 26 miles in a single stretch.

Too frequently, runners ignore what their bodies are telling them and continue with their regular training. This inevitably leads to that flat, "out-of-shape" feeling, illness or worse—an injury that can sideline you for a while.

Recovery Immediately After & During the First Few Hours

- *Keep moving and change clothes as soon as possible to stay warm and dry.* Resist the tendency to just stop and plop! A gradual five- or 10-minute cool-down is important and will enhance the recovery process. Excessive lengthening or shortening may trigger spasm in damaged muscle, so if you want to stretch after the race, stretch gently.
- *Light massage or icing may reduce muscle soreness and speed recovery.* Although a long, hot bath or time in the hot tub sounds good, wait a day or two for this luxury. Heat immediately after the event may increase swelling and muscle soreness.
- *Rest is one of the most important components of a successful training program.* Endurance events such as a marathon pose special challenges in terms of replenishing fluid stores, repairing cellular damage in muscle and regaining a sensible mental drive. Other factors, such as environmental conditions (hot/cold, humid/dry), terrain (hilly/flat), intensity and your own physical condition (rested/fatigued, trained/untrained) will affect the recovery process.
- *Drink, drink, drink.* Complete restoration of your fluid balance is a critical part of recovery, particularly in hot, humid conditions. A combination of various fluids, including water, juice, smoothies and recovery beverages, will help replenish lost fluids, sodium and electrolytes. Alcohol intake should be minimized during the rehydration process, as alcohol may increase urine output and sabotage your rehydration efforts.
- *Eat.* Early food intake is essential to fuel replacement following endurance exercise and assists in restoring hydration levels. While complete reloading of muscular glycogen may take up to 48 to 72 hours, a significant portion can be refueled in the initial two to four hours after the race. A protein/carb shake consumed within 15 minutes of the event is a quick and efficient way to start the recovery process by providing a

quick boost of fluid, protein and carbohydrates. The quantities and timing of carbohydrate and protein feedings are based on body weight. Consult with a dietitian or qualified sports nutritionist for an individualized plan.

- *Check yourself out.* Look for blisters, rashes and other irritated areas that may require treatment to prevent infection and further injury.

The Day After

- Post-race depression is common after the euphoric high of finishing, due in part to fatigue and soreness and a natural letdown after achieving a significant goal. Take time to celebrate your achievement, then evaluate your performance, review your training regimen and set new goals.
- A light 10- to 15-minute walk/jog may help to promote circulation and aid healing and recovery. An alternate exercise modality might allow the fatigued muscles an opportunity to recover.
- Continue to rest and recover, and continue to consume fluids and a moderate-to-high carbohydrate diet (50 to 65% of total calories).

The Week After

- Continue to rest, as fatigue or lack of energy may still be present.
- Relax. This is your week to basically do "nothing." Give your musculoskeletal system a break, an opportunity to repair and remodel. Resist the temptation to train, even if you do not feel excessive fatigue and soreness. Studies demonstrate greater muscular strength five days after an event in athletes who completely rested versus those jogging or exercising in the days following the marathon. Additionally, exercise may only delay the refueling/rehydration process. As you gradually become more active, avoid training too hard, as doing so leads to an extended recovery and unnecessary injury.

Two to Four Weeks After

Gradually return to your training routine, but remember that complete musculoskeletal recovery may take up to a month. Don't be afraid to take a day or two off should you start feeling soreness and/or fatigue.

- *Week 2:* Aim for 25 to 50% of pre-marathon weekly mileage. Train no more than three or

four times, allowing at least three rest days. Run at a conversational pace.

- *Week 3:* Aim for 50 to 70% of pre-marathon weekly mileage. Train no more than three or four times, allowing at least three rest days.
- *Week 4:* Aim for 60 to 80% of your pre-marathon weekly mileage. Train no more than four or five times, allowing at least two rest days.
- Maintain proper hydration and emphasize good nutrition throughout this recovery month. Your muscles need adequate fuel and protein to continue healing and support your modest training routine.

After the first month, continue to gradually increase your training (by 10 to 15% per week) until you've eased back into your normal routine. Good luck, and remember, rest means the opportunity to compete and train. An injury means watching from the sidelines.

Additional Resources

Marathontraining.com—Life After the Marathon: www.marathontraining.com/marathon/m_lifea.html

Runnersworld.com—Life After 26: www.runnersworld.com/marathon/article-life-after_26_2.html

Active.com—A 6-step Plan to Speedy Marathon Recovery: www.active.com/running/Articles/A_6-step_Plan_to_Speedy_Marathon_Recovery.htm

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at www.acefitness.org/GetFit and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts™



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