Fit Facts™

HOW TO TRAIN FOR A HALF-MARATHON

Your specific approach to half-marathon training will depend on multiple variables: the time available to train, running background (novice vs. experienced runner), current fitness level and mileage, willingness to commit to a training plan and ability to learn to listen to your body.

That said, if you're patient and willing to put in the time to develop the endurance to run 13.1 miles and learn how to fuel correctly, crossing the finish line can be a memorable and fun experience. To help you get started, here are some general guidelines for half-marathon training.

- Before you start running, visit your local running shoe store to pick the right shoe for you, which is the first step to avoid injury. Look for a training plan online from a reliable and credible source, such as www.runnersworld.com, www.running.about.com, or www.teamintraining.org, work with an ACE-certified Personal Trainer, or contact your local running club to inquire about half-marathon training groups.
- Find a friend or partner to run with to keep you motivated and accountable.
- Avoid doing too much, too soon. This can lead to injury or burnout. Gradually build the endurance to run 13.1 miles over 10 weeks or longer, but don't increase your long run by more than 10 percent over the previous week. Build endurance before working on speed.
- Most training plans recommend running at least three days a week, with each run having a specific purpose: speed, tempo or distance. The speed work helps you get faster;

tempo runs help you maintain a faster pace during the event; and the long-distance runs will increase your endurance.

✔ Long-distance runs: These runs are designed to gradually build up your long runs to 12 miles. You should be able to talk during these runs, keeping the pace at a low-to-moderate intensity level. Use these runs to test your fluid and fuel intake needs to see what works best for you.

✔ Speed work (for experienced runners): Practice repeats of 400, 800 and 1600 meters on a track. These workouts should be 30 minutes or less with an active recovery period (light jogging or running, or if needed, walking) between each set. Never do any speed work, if you're injured, feel sore, aren't recovered from a previous run or feel like you may be getting injured.

✔ Tempo runs: These range from 2 miles to 8 miles at a faster-than-normal training pace, or 15 seconds faster than your targeted half-marathon per-mile pace. They should be at least 25 percent shorter than your long run. Some people prefer running by time, such as doing two repeats of running for five minutes at tempo (at lactate threshold, or where talking is difficult) with two minutes of active recovery (or jogging) between each five-minute run. You should run for no more than 30 minutes.

• The National Athletic Trainers' Association recommends drinking 500–600 mL (17–20 oz) of fluids two hours prior to exercise and 200–300 mL (7–10 oz) of fluids every 10–20 minutes during exercise. For workouts lasting longer than 60 minutes—which will be the case during your long runs—switch to a sports drink to replace sodium and carbohydrates. Some runners prefer consuming energy gels with water.

- Train to race: At half-marathon races, you will find aid stations supplying you with water, sports drinks and nutrition. Find out during training, which fluids and foods you can stomach—literally.
- Cross-train: Biking, strength training and yoga or other flexibility training will help you become more fit and, likely, a better runner. However, it will not substitute for putting in the miles of running.
- Visit www.mypyramid.gov for nutrition guidance.
- Wake up early on race day and eat a light breakfast two hours prior to your race, such as oatmeal or a bagel with a banana (test different breakfasts before your long training runs), to give you the energy you need to run 13.1 miles. Avoid eating solid foods just prior to your race. This can cause stomach issues or diarrhea. Fiber is not your friend on race morning.
- Never try any new footwear or apparel on race day, since they may rub, fit too tightly, chafe or be uncomfortable.

Finally, don't get caught up in running out too fast on race day. Run at your own pace and pick up speed during the last six miles to finish strong.

Additional Resource

Runner's World: www.runnersworld.com

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.™