

Marathon

Race Strategies



Marathon Race Strategies

Feel free to send a copy of this report to any of your friends who are training for a marathon.

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Websites:

www.personallogs.com

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The goal of this report is simply to help you run a successful marathon. Over the years I have run more than 25 marathons and I've learned a lot from other runners and from my own experiences during this time.

Mike Stapenhurst

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Marathon Week

Although the primary goal of this e-book is to help you run the best marathon you can, we need to look at some key things you have to do in the few days before the race. If you neglect these important days your race day strategy won't count for much!

Review your marathon goal!

Setting a goal time to complete a marathon is not easy, especially if this is your first marathon. However I'll assume you've gone through the process and have come up with a (realistic!) time for yourself. Now you should look back over your training; did you meet your goals (especially the long runs), did you get injured...? If you have any doubts it's best to add some time to your goal.

Personally I prefer to pick a target 10 min range like 3hr 35m – 3 hr 45 m. This gives me more flexibility to adjust things once I get started.

Rest and Relaxation

This is the 'order of the day'. You can ruin your race if you try to do too much during this week. Make sure you get plenty of sleep. I often don't sleep too well the night before, especially if I have traveled to the marathon, so I try and get a really good sleep two days prior to the race. Try to keep your stress level low too, by purposely avoiding the common 'stressors' in your life.

Mileage



You won't be running much during this week. I recommend two relaxed runs, about 7 and 4 days before the actual race. I also like to run an easy three miles the day before the race, just to keep the 'parts' moving. However this is probably more mental than anything else.

Here is a typical week:

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
5	0	4	0	0	3	26

Whatever you do, avoid the temptation (because you are feeling strong) to do a 'last' hard or long run the week before the marathon. You don't want to wreck all of that good training with a mistake in the final week.

Diet

➤ What you eat is very important as you approach the big event.

I have experimented with various dietary modifications during the week before (usually over-indulging in Carbo-loading foods!) and have come to the conclusion that it didn't help my performance, and may even have hindered. My recommendation is to stick with what you have been doing during training.

I go with the pasta dinner the night before, more out of tradition than anything. I also have I have had no ill effects from doing this, but you need to follow your own preferences here.

Hydration

➤ You also need to drink plenty of water. Not just the day before – the whole week.

This is partly based on my belief that you shouldn't do anything too much out of the ordinary (i.e. consuming a whole lot more liquids than normal) the day before a marathon. A good intake (10 to 12 glasses) of water the day before will help make sure you are well hydrated at race time.

The Mental Aspect

Every little ache and pain seems to be magnified by a factor of 10 in the pre-race week. If you are a worrier, then you are going to spend a lot of time concerned about your health and readiness for the race. If you have made it this far into the training I say "Don't Worry". I have gone to the start line many times concerned about aches that weren't there a week ago! But as soon as the race got started, and I warmed up, I totally forgot about any residual pains.

It helps to visualize the race in your mind. If you have had a chance to go over the course by car previously, this will be a tremendous help when you are actually running the race.

Not that it makes it any shorter, but it's good to know what's coming up, where the halfway point is, etc.

The day before the race

- To sum it up in three words – Take it Easy! Don't spend hours on your feet sightseeing or browsing the race Expo. Sure you can do some of this, but you need to have plenty of R & R.
- Try an easy (slower than your marathon pace) 3 mile run the morning before. It certainly has helped me to keep loosened up for the race on the following day.
- Don't over-eat, and stick with the foods your body can handle. I normally have a salad for lunch and then the pre-race pasta supper in the early evening. Don't have much alcohol either, one beer or a glass of wine is enough.
- Get your gear ready for the next day (don't forget the sun block and Vaseline). You don't want to be rushing around looking for your favorite pair of socks just before it's time to leave.
- Go to bed early, so you won't have a hard time getting up the next day.

Pre-race Preparation

- **Get up early**, so you have plenty of time to get ready before setting out.
- **Wear suitable clothing**. Sometimes it's difficult to know what to wear, especially since many marathons take place in the changeable seasons of Spring and Fall. Listen to the weather forecast (and hope they're right!), and dress accordingly. When I'm not sure I usually go with the lighter option such as a singlet versus T-shirt.
- **Warm-up clothes are necessary** if it's a cold morning. You don't want to get too cold waiting for the race to start. Anything from garbage bags to old T-shirts or sweatshirts will do. I like the T-shirt/sweatshirt option because you can actually start the race, and get rid of it later at an aid station.
- **Creams**. Avoid a burn by putting on plenty of sun block with a high SPF. You will be out there for several hours, and could get a nasty burn on a warm sunny day. If you are subject to chafing (and even if you are not) it's a good idea to put some Vaseline on the tender spots like the under-arm and groin.

- **Drink more water.** You're probably sick of drinking water by now; but you should drink a glass or so before heading out to the start line.
- **Have a light breakfast.** I don't recommend you skip breakfast. If you have something light such as toast and a banana you shouldn't suffer any adverse effects. During my training I always have a light breakfast before my weekly long runs so my body is used to the routine. Be sure though if you eat anything to allow plenty of time before the race starts so your food can digest or you may get cramps during the race.
- **Pre-race warm up -** Keep moving when you get to the starting area. It's OK to rest, but you should do a light warm-up such as an easy jog or brisk walk for 5 minutes or so, just before the race. Of course this is much harder to do at the mega-marathons like New York and Chicago with all the crowds.

Race Strategy

All that training and marathon day is finally here. You're up early and, hopefully slept well, so you're rested and ready for those last minute details of race day morning. You look out the window and see what the weather looks like and check the local temperature. Of course, this is the twentieth time you've checked the weather forecast over the past few days.

A **race strategy** will help you run the best marathon you can. There are many things that can affect you during this long event. If you have thought about them previously then you should be prepared to adjust during the run and complete a successful marathon.

➔ What is a 'Successful Marathon'? For me, a successful marathon is one in which I was able to finish without hitting the wall and without too much pain. If I come close to my target time so much the better.

Key factors that will affect your performance during the race are:

- Your target time
- Your pace
- Your conditioning and fitness level
- The weather
- The marathon course

The effect of each of these on your final result is discussed in detail below.

Your target time

I believe an over-optimistic target time and race pace is the primary cause of marathoners running into problems such as leg cramps, hitting the wall and running out of energy well before the end of the race.

One of the most important things you can do at the start of the race is take into account the main factors that can affect your performance and modify your target time if necessary. For example if the weather is extreme, especially too hot, you would do well to add 10 – 15 minutes to your goal. I usually add 30 seconds to my pace, which equates to 13 minutes extra.

I know this is a hard choice to make after all your training, but it's better to be realistic up front than to 'crash' at the 18 mile mark and limp into the finish line.

Your Pace

It's usually better to start out at a slower pace than your intended race pace. Don't expect to run the complete race at exactly the same pace – it just doesn't happen that way.

"But if I go slower at the beginning" you say, "I'll never meet my goal".
Wrong!

The common belief that you will slow down in the second half is only true because you went out too fast in the first half!

I know because I've done it both ways! So, if it's a warm day, or a challenging course take those first few miles easy (30 seconds to one minute slower than your "intended" pace), and see how things work out. If the weather is hot, you definitely need to go slower for the first few miles. **Your body will adjust** to the conditions, and you will be able to gradually pick up the pace.

Your conditioning and fitness level

If you haven't done enough training then you are probably going to have a tough time, unless you take it really easy. On the other hand if you have done too much hard training you could also get tired long before mile 26. This is difficult to judge at the start of a race, but you should look back over your training anyway. Did you run a 20 miler less than three weeks prior to the marathon for example?

Have you caught a cold recently? I normally monitor my pulse rate on a regular basis during training. If this is elevated on race day, it's a sign that your body might be fighting an infection.

→ Remember if you are not feeling 100% fit, you should modify your target finish time.

The weather

The weather can have a huge impact on your race. It can be too hot, too cold, too windy, too everything! Personally, when I am training I try to go out in adverse conditions just in case that's the way marathon day turns out.

I've had the most difficulty when the weather has been warmer than expected

- It is most important that you start out slower to compensate for adverse weather until you are used to the conditions. Then you can gradually pick up the pace.

If you are running into a headwind, you will be using more energy than normal, and will tire too soon if you keep pushing the pace early on.

The Marathon Course

It helps a lot if you are familiar with the marathon course, either because you have run it before or you have driven it. Many marathons boast of a 'flat' course but when you're at mile 18 even a slight incline can feel like a mountain if you are struggling. If the course is known for having some challenging spots like Heartbreak Hill at Boston, my advice is to ease up before you get there so you have some energy in reserve.

Running the race



The starting ceremony is over and you're finally underway. It's easy to get caught up in the general enthusiasm and excitement and forget all of your good intentions!

Keeping in mind the race strategies we discussed above, there are however some additional things to consider:

Running with a group

If you've run marathons before you've probably seen groups of people running together with someone holding a balloon with a time like $4^{1/2}$ hours written on it. They divided $4^{1/2}$ by 26.2 and came up with a 10.3 minute per mile pace, which is the pace they'll be doing right from the start.

Stay away from these groups if you want to run your own race. The company is great but as the miles go by the group usually starts to thin out...! The exception would be if this pace were slower than your intended (average) pace. Then you might join up with them for a few miles at the beginning.

Running with a friend or friends



This is a great alternative to the organized groups running together on a time schedule. Especially if this is someone you ran with during your marathon training. Make sure you have similar goals though, and also an understanding that you don't have to stay together for the complete marathon.

Walking Breaks

What – walk during a race! That would have been my reaction not too many years ago. However you see lots of people walking during the later miles in the marathon. Unfortunately this is not because they chose to walk, it's because they had to!

Don't wait until you are forced into slowing down to a near-walk. By being pro-active you can conserve energy, change the leg muscle rhythm and avoid this situation.

If you do choose to walk during your marathon, do it at regular time intervals. Here are a couple that are really easy to follow.

- **Run 18 minutes, walk 2** to round it up to 20. The next break would be at 38 and 58 minutes and so on.
- **Run 28 minutes, walk 2** to round off to 30-minute intervals.

Of course you can use shorter or longer walking periods to suit yourself. You will be surprised at the benefit you'll get from these short walks.

Liquid Intake

Your body needs to be kept hydrated during the race. Most marathon courses are well equipped with water stops throughout the race, so there is no excuse for not taking enough liquid. But I've done exactly that. I ran past the first few water stops figuring I didn't need it. I realize now, **if you wait until you are thirsty**, then it's probably too late!

→ Make sure you stop for water frequently, right from the start of the race.

Nutrition

Power Gels and other snack foods have become quite popular among marathon runners over the last few years. They can definitely help give you an energy 'boost' during this long race. If you haven't been using them during training I advise you not take too many during the race. Wait until the 16 mile mark or later.

Break the race into segments

Twenty-six miles is a long way, and when you just get going it seems even further. To give yourself a mental 'leg-up' it really helps to break the marathon distance into several 'races'. To be effective you have to *forget about the far-off finish line* and simply focus on the next stage.

Here are the typical segments I go for during the marathon:

1. **6 miles** (approximately 10K): This is the warm up part of the race, and I use this to see how I'm feeling at this point. It's a good place to decide on your pace for the next little while.
2. **10 miles**: Just a round number, it makes a good time split. For example 80 minutes means you would have averaged an 8 minute pace.
3. **13.1** – half way: This is a reality check. If you're not feeling good you should alter your pace and/or walking breaks accordingly.

4. **16 miles:** For me this is an important point because you've just over 10 miles to go. I usually know at the 16 mile mark if I am going to finish well or if I'll be struggling.
 - ▶ Expect to feel some decrease in your energy level, you're in the 'hitting the wall' zone. Keep going though you can push through it!
5. **20 miles:** Only 10K left! Now you can hang in and aim for the finish line.

Conclusion

I am convinced that if you follow the tips and advice outlined here you will meet your marathon goal, finish well and complete the race without too much difficulty.

***** *If you liked this report...* *****

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Actual Readers' Comments:

"Very helpful book. Easy to read and understand. Get this book if you're going to run a marathon"

"Loved it. Pumped me up about my upcoming first marathon..."

"This is a well written guide to training yourself for marathon running. I was surprised at how many tips the author provides in this book"
