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Training for a Marathon

Prepare your mind and body for all 26 miles

by Usha Krishnan Sliva
July 14, 2009

I remember the first time I was inspired to run. I must have been seven or eight years old and I switched on our old black and white television. The man I spotted immediately was not the first or even second runner. He was placed third. But the look on his face as he ran that race was captivating. It was a mixture of concentration, desire and mixed with it all, pleasure!

And that's exactly what marathon running requires. For most of us, the task seems daunting; more so if we are only an occasional runner. Even seasoned runners balk at the thought of preparing for a marathon. It's a challenge which, once accepted, requires a lot of hard work. And the key to it all is preparation!

Running a marathon, which is a **road race of 42 kilometers or 26 miles**, takes a lot of practice and most runners will begin with smaller races. These races are also friendlier and provide a good training board to jump off from. It's also a good idea to work with a running partner. If you don't have a friend

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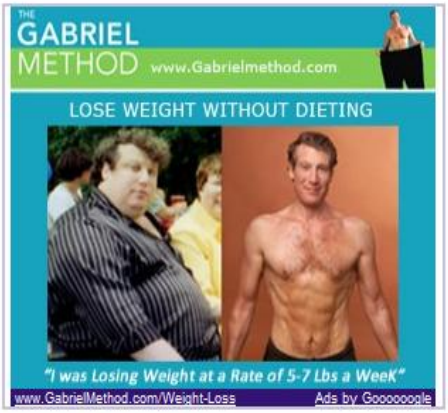

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most runners will begin with smaller races. These races are also friendlier and provide a good training board to jump off from. It's also a good idea to work with a running partner. If you don't have a friend you can persuade to come along, training clinics such as the **Running Room** or the **Road Runners Club of America** will set someone up for you to train with. Apart from training partners, these clubs are a great place to find coaches, mentors and gain valuable advice firsthand from runners who have been there and done it!

For a marathon, you would ideally train for between 20-30 weeks to get to your peak level, which depends on how long you've been running and in what condition your body is.

Before you begin, consult with your physician and get medical approval to train. A marathon is a vigorous race and you need to be assured that your body can handle it. Next, get the correct gear to train and race in. This again would depend on the city you'll be running in and what the weather will be like when you are running the final race. Invest in a good pair of shoes; that is probably the highest investment you will need to make. It's also smart to ask the advice of the store's consultant before making the purchase.

The next thing you need to evaluate are your dietary habits. If you've been on snack and go or fast food diets, then now is the time to put that away. You will need to make nutritious choices of foods high in carbohydrates, which provide you the much needed fuel for your practices. This does not mean overindulging; you still need to eat low-fat food, such as lean chicken and turkey and low-fat dairy products; only **it will be interspersed with healthy carbohydrate choices** such as whole wheat pasta and bread. As you train and get into shape, you'll actually want to eat healthy food. A plate of carrot and celery sticks will never look so good!

You will also need to start getting used to consuming more water, drinking at least 4 liters per day. While fruit and vegetables are a must in any healthy diet, remember that too much fiber can cause bloating and digestive problems, so keep these to a minimum on race day. And no matter the stress, avoid caffeine as it is a diuretic and will dehydrate you.

Now that you're all set for the big race, you have to focus on the **actual training which will get you there**. Unless you can invest in a personal trainer, you will need to rely on your own schedule and the motivation which comes via friends, family and your training partner. The idea is to begin slowly, running at least five days per week and building up your distance and speed as you go along. Your training runs should be slow days interspersed with faster runs; and where possible, take your breaks in-between races. If you are at a beginner's level, you may need to schedule in more than 30 weeks for training; if you can already run for 30 minutes without stopping, then you begin to increase your distance from those 30 minutes.

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Even regular marathon runners will almost never run a complete marathon distance while training. They maintain their stamina to the point where reaching the final distance is not impossible. Recreational runners will try and make it to at least the 32 kilometer (20 mile) distance during their training sessions or a total of around 64 kilometers (40 miles) per week. Shorter distances will not prepare you enough to complete a final run and longer distances may pose the risk of injuries before the race.

Most runners will take a couple of days off running before the final day, in order to give their body time to recover. On the actual race day, few runners will eat beforehand, but it is advisable to have a light snack such as a power bar. And take with you and drink lots of water. Your body will need it!

In conclusion, there are certain points that anyone training for a marathon needs to keep in mind:

- Motivation is the hardest part and so seek guidance and support from friends, family and running clinics.
- Stick to your schedule, even if it's for a small run around the block.
- Always stretch before and after you run. Use it as part of your warming up and cooling down routine.
- Maintain a slow and steady pace. You need to find the rhythm within you.
- Set small and reasonable goals, so you don't feel disheartened when you fail to accomplish them.
- And finally, be persistent. As with anything that you really want, you need to keep at it before you can claim it.

The training may be hard and the discomfort at times, great. But the rewards that come with crossing the finish line is something that any runner or would be runner will find hard to describe. Go for it and see for yourself!

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