

MARATHONER

What to Expect When Training for and Running a MARATHON

- Mile-by-Mile Insights from Prerace Rituals to Negotiating Aid Stations to Hitting the Wall to Postrace Recovery
- Training Tips from Shoes and Gear Selection to Avoiding Injury to Diet
- Advice from Top Marathoners Shalane Flanagan, Meb Keflezighi, Des Linden, Amanda McGrory, and More
- Guidance from Coaches, Doctors, Nutritionists, and Celebrity Runners

Matthew Huff

UNIVERSE



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Prerace

Welcome to *Marathoner*! When I think of this 26.2-mile behemoth of a race, I keep thinking of two quotations I accumulated while writing this book. The first is from Michal Kapral, who won the Toronto Marathon in 2002: “I love the idea of pushing yourself to the limit because that’s how I always ran. I never felt like I had much raw talent, but I felt like I could out-suffer people. That’s how the marathon appealed to me. It’s a great distance to suffer.” Cheery, right?

Running a marathon is certainly a difficult and painful endeavor. If you sign up for a race thinking anything else, then you are in for a rude awakening. Over the months of training for and finally running a marathon, you will encounter all sorts of feelings and experiences you didn’t know were possible, and most of them won’t be pleasant. The marathon is a masochist’s sport.

The second quotation is from Boston Marathon winner and journalist Amby Burfoot, who told me marathons aren’t about winning or losing (only one person wins, and most likely it won’t be you). Instead, he said, “It’s about everyday people doing extraordinary things with their lives—finishing marathons, and losing weight, and getting in shape, and going to graduate school, and surviving divorce, and the infinite number of stories that are out there.”

Marathons are about overcoming. We don’t run marathons because they’re easy. We run them because they’re a nightmare to get through, but by finishing them we prove to ourselves that we will not be defeated by adversity. We prove to ourselves that by surviving this pain maybe we can survive other pains. We prove that we are resilient, that we cannot be stopped, that we are stronger than we thought we were. So, who’s ready? Let’s get running!



<< *Tokyo Marathon, Japan, 2009*

26 Marathon Training Tips

There are countless books dedicated solely to marathon training: detailed schedules of exactly how long to run and when and at what speeds, what stretches and exercises to do on off days, what foods you should be eating and in what quantities, and precisely how to best use your foam roller. Unfortunately, we've got limited space here, but if you want my day-by-day training schedule or my guacamole recipe, feel free to send me a private message via social media. I do, however, have some tips for you. Here are 26. That's one for every mile.

- **1: Commit to running the marathon.** Meb Keflezighi says, "We all have trouble getting out the door, so lacing up the shoes for everyone is hard, but if you commit, you will excel no matter what."
- **2: Download a training calendar.** Depending on your experience level, you will want more or less lead time to train. In general, all training is the same, with one progressively longer run each week, as well as two to four shorter runs.
- **3: Start with the shoes.** People love to buy running gadgets, but rather than purchasing a fancy watch right away, get the shoes and start training. Once you've been running for a bit, you'll have a better idea as to exactly which accoutrements you need.
- **4: Cross train.** Having a strong, fit body will help you stay healthy and uninjured on long runs. Core strength is especially important.
- **5: Stretch.** It goes without saying, but . . .
- **6: Put Beyoncé on your playlist.** She is a motivator.
- **7: Get used to uncomfortable.** The sooner you realize this is going to be difficult, the better off you'll be.

- **8: Set aside time for those long runs.** Put them all on your calendar now so you can schedule around them. Skipping long runs is the fastest route to failure.
- **9: Run with a marathoner.** Ryan Hall says, "For first-time marathoners, I think it's important to train with people who have run marathons. That way you can get confidence from knowing that you're training with people who have done what you're trying to do."
- **10: Don't run with a concussion (or really any injury).** If you hit your head getting off a bus, don't run a marathon. I can tell you from personal experience. The same goes for knee, ankle, hip, and back injuries. Take a break and recover. Running a race is not worth it.

- **11: Have a hydration strategy.**

Either know where you can get water on long runs or bring a water bottle with you. We don't want you passing out on us.



□ **12: Invest in nonchafing clothes.** Your office's volunteer day cotton shirt is great for short distances, but it's going to cause issues on two-plus-hour runs.



□ **13: Sunscreen it up.**

You don't want to burn on the long runs. If you're looking for a tan, get it on the short days.

□ **14: Plan for bad weather.**

You never know what race day will hold, so practice running in the heat, rain, wind, and snow. This is also a good opportunity to test your gear for various meteorological situations.

□ **15: Run early in the summer.** Set that alarm clock and get up when it's still dark. Shadows are your greatest treasure on a long run.

□ **16: Carb-load for training.** When you're in your heaviest weeks, practice eating what you're planning to before race day. This is a great time for a few dry runs.

□ **17: Make your longest run long.** Many people top out at 18 or 20 miles before the marathon. I always like to do 22. It gives you that much more confidence on race day.

□ **18: Find a running buddy.** Even if it's just for one run a week, it will break up the monotony.

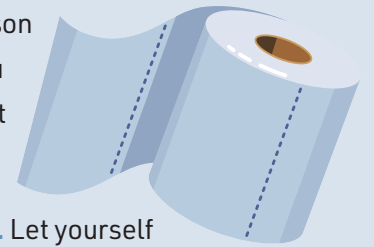
□ **19: Get someone to watch the kids.** Marathon training is not something to tackle on the fly. Get a sitter for those long runs if you need to.

□ **20: Lay off the booze.** There is nothing less fun than running 18 miles hungover.

□ **21: Run to a destination.** Set up your long runs to end somewhere fun. A post-20-mile doughnut or Slurpee is a godsend.

□ **22: Document yourself.** If people know you're running, you're more likely to run, so don't be afraid to post your journey on social media.

□ **23: Have a bathroom strategy.** Know where the toilets are located along your long runs. You might need them even if you jettison your extra cargo before you start. Also carry some toilet paper. You might need it.



□ **24: Taper like a champ.** Let yourself rest in those last couple weeks before the marathon. Now is not the time for a hiking trip.

□ **25: Go to bed early.** If you're getting up early, you still need to be well rested.

□ **26: Envision yourself crossing the finish line.** When the going gets tough, remember what you're doing this for and what you're trying to accomplish.



Which Marathon Should You Run?

With more than 800 marathons held annually around the world, you've got a ton of options when it comes to earning that 26.2 bumper sticker. So which race should you sign up for? Here are some things to consider as you make your choice.

■ **Easy Access:** Home-field advantage is real. Picking a marathon close to home (especially for your first) can be a huge boost. Sleep in your own bed the night before, banish all those travel anxieties, and train on similar terrain to the race. Most importantly, you can easily guilt every person you know into cheering for you.

■ **Barrier to Entry:** Major marathons (New York, Chicago, London) have more applicants than places for runners, so you've got to win a lottery (or raise a ton of money for charity) in order to enter. You'll need to plan ahead to get into one of these. Boston is even trickier because you have to qualify with a *very* fast time in a previous marathon.

■ **Trail vs. Road:** While road races are more popular, trail marathons are growing. With more difficult terrain, less course support, and fewer runners, these races require additional training, so don't sign up unless you've spent some time running trails. They do, however, offer more nature and none of those dreaded highway stretches.

■ **Price:** Yes, you do have to pay for the torture of running a marathon, and in some cases you must pay a pretty penny. The 2019 New York City Marathon, for example, cost \$295 to run (\$358 for non-US residents). Meanwhile, smaller marathons, like the City of Trees Marathon in Boise, Idaho, costs as little as \$68 depending on when you sign up. Virtual races are even cheaper (see page 189 for more information).

■ **Time of Year:** With around three months of training recommended, choosing a marathon by race date is common. Spring marathons require training in the cold, while fall marathons mean you're running in August. Marathons in summer or winter are rarer, but you can find one every weekend of the year.

■ **Weather:** If you're trying to avoid the heat or rain or cold, choose a more temperate marathon. Most races include typical weather forecasts on their websites, so you can plan ahead. For more information on race-day weather, see the chapter starting on page 95.

■ **The Goodies:** Many middle-tier marathons seek to differentiate themselves with their swag. Scope out Instagram to see which races dole out the biggest medals, best participant tees, or fun extras.

■ **Fans:** Cheering crowds are a huge motivating force—especially in the back half of a marathon—so picking a race known for its roadside supporters is a perk.

<< *Clockwise from top left: Venice Marathon, Italy, 2009; San Francisco Marathon, California, USA, 2017; Tokyo Marathon, Japan, 2009; Philadelphia Marathon, Pennsylvania, USA, 2006; Toronto Marathon, Canada, 2015; Antarctica Marathon, Antarctica, 1997*
Page 17: *Berlin Marathon, Germany, 2006*

“Over the months of training for a marathon, you will encounter all sorts of feelings and experiences you didn’t know were possible.”





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Marathon Morning

The predawn hours before the blast of the airhorn were created solely for worrying. For months, you have meticulously trained for these 26.2 miles, but sometime in the middle of the night, while you were sleeping (because a well-rested body is a strong body), the reality set in. All of that training could go down the drain if you make a misstep in your last hours of prerace prep. Do the right things, however, and your future self will thank you.

First up, food. Eating too much can lead to cramps (or, worse, puking), but eating too little can leave you flagging well before the finish. Veteran marathon pacer Jim Crist suggests taking in 500 to 600 calories as soon as you wake up so the food is digested by the time you hit the starting line. Then eat a snack (granola bar or banana) an hour before the start. Get a good mix of carbs and protein (you'll see a lot of peanut butter bagels on marathoning blogs), and steer clear of anything your body isn't used to. There's no need to try a new breakfast burrito and spend half of the race in port-o-john lines.

Hydrate on a similar schedule. Drink a big ol' glass of water when you wake up (say three to four hours before the start), and sip on a Gatorade while you're on the way to the starting line. To prevent a sloshy stomach and early bathroom breaks, though, avoid chugging fluids in the immediate runup to the race.

Before you head for the start, you also need to get your gear and clothes in order. Apply sunscreen, and lather antichafing balm or Vaseline on your thighs or armpits to prevent friction. Men, you also need to tape or lubricate your nipples to avoid a tandem of scarlet letters soaking through your shirt.

Consult your weather app one last time and decide what to wear. Keep in mind that you can always take layers off, but unless you plan to make a pit stop at Gap midmarathon you can't add layers. Wearing raggedy old sweatshirts or garbage bags can be a good solution if it's a cold morning; you can stay warm while you're waiting for the gun and then ditch them once you're warmed up. Marathon workers will pick up whatever you leave behind, but you might not want to part with your \$200 Under Armour hoodie.

Don't tie your shoes too tight (extra blisters) or too loose (tendon nightmare). Don't forget your bib. Don't forget your gels. Don't forget your gear-check bag, water bottle, ankle brace, or headphones (if the race allows them). Whatever got you through those training runs is what you'll want with you for the actual race.

And, most important of all, don't forget to poop. Bowel movement anxiety is the paramount stress of all marathoners. Waiting in line for a dank port-o-john at Mile 12 that 50 other racers have already, er, borrowed, is every racer's nightmare. You lose time, you lose momentum, your body gets stiff. So instead spend some time prerun jettisoning all waste from your body.

Most races request that you arrive to the start an hour early, even earlier if there is security, which gives you plenty of time to stretch before the start. It also gives you plenty of time to worry. Did you train enough? How are

26 + 1 Marathons to Run

Caught the marathon bug and looking for more races to run? Here's a bucket list of some of the greatest marathons around the globe each year. From the world majors and big-city street races to international adventures and my favorite small-town events, I've got you covered. Here's one for each mile and an extra as a treat.

WORLD MAJORS

- 1. Berlin Marathon**
Berlin, Germany
- 2. Boston Marathon**
Boston, Massachusetts
- 3. Chicago Marathon**
Chicago, Illinois
- 4. London Marathon**
London, United Kingdom
- 5. New York City Marathon**
New York City, New York
- 6. Tokyo Marathon**
Tokyo, Japan

US RACES

- 7. Atlanta Marathon**
Atlanta, Georgia
- 8. Big Sur Marathon**
Big Sur, California
- 9. Detroit Marathon**
Detroit, Michigan

- 10. Hatfield-McCoy Marathon**
South Williamson, Kentucky
- 11. Houston Marathon**
Houston, Texas
- 12. Los Angeles Marathon**
Los Angeles, California
- 13. Marine Corps Marathon**
Washington, DC
- 14. Portland Marathon**
Portland, Oregon
- 15. Twin Cities Marathon**
Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota
- 16. Vermont City Marathon**
Burlington, Vermont

INTERNATIONAL RACES

- 17. Athens Marathon**
Athens, Greece
- 18. Great Ocean Road Marathon**
Victoria, Australia

- 19. Great Wall Marathon**
Tianjin, China
- 20. Inca Trail Marathon**
Cusco, Peru
- 21. Lewa Safari Marathon**
Lewa Downs, Kenya
- 22. Midnight Sun Marathon**
Tromsø, Norway
- 23. Paris Marathon**
Paris, France
- 24. Petra Desert Marathon**
Petra, Jordan
- 25. Rotterdam Marathon**
Rotterdam, Netherlands
- 26. Toronto Waterfront Marathon**
Toronto, Canada

AND FINALLY . . .

- 27. Your Hometown Marathon!**

you going to tackle that hill at Mile 22? Will you beat your personal record? Should you run with the pace group? Did you feel a weird twinge in your knee? Should you try to "go" one last time?

You will hear the race announcers thanking sponsors and the mayor saying things like, "You couldn't have asked for better weather," but that's all in the background. Mostly you'll just want the airhorn to sound. Every marathon is a mystery until you start. Some troubles will arise. Most will not. But the only way to find out is to run.



How Are You Getting to the Starting Line?

Yeah, sure, the 26.2 is a big deal, but the journey to the starting line can be the stuff of harrowing legend as well. Start times are early, parking is a nightmare, and all the while you're fretting over the schedule of your, er, guts. So I'm going to help you out. Here is your step-by-step guide to the race before the race.

