



Running training plan: Marathon beginner

March 2019

In partnership with

running
withus 

COACHING &
CONSULTANCY
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Introduction

This training plan, put together by our coaching partners Running With Us, is designed to get you to the start line of the marathon feeling prepared and confident that you can achieve your goal.

1 Is this the right plan for me?

This 16 week beginners runner's plan is designed for those who are either new to regular running or those stepping up to longer distances for the first time. This plan will see you training 3-4 times a week and we would encourage you to complement the running outline with core conditioning and cross training as outlined in our Running Guide.

5 What do all the terms mean?

All the training schedules involve a broad variety of training sessions and intensities. We have a full glossary of different terms you will see in this guide, such as 'threshold running' and 'progression runs'.

2 What if I'm not there yet

This training plan assumes you are able to run for 20-30 minutes continuously at an easy pace. Really focus on holding back your effort on your easy runs – many beginner runners try to run them a little too hard. You can always mix the sessions in the plan with cross training. Our 'run/walk' plan might be for you if you feel this is too much of a step up.

6 What if I miss a session, pick up a niggle or get sick?

No training plan is designed to be a tablet of stone; it's a guide and only one approach to get you in great shape. Training for a marathon is a journey, though, and doesn't always go smoothly. Feel free to chop and change the plan and shift runs to different days that may work better for you. Take care not to run back-to-back 'hard' days – so try to avoid running a threshold session followed the next day by a hill session, for example.

3 Why train in this way?

If you keep doing the same things over and over again you can't expect different results. This plan is designed to add variety, structure and progression to your training. It will challenge you across a range of different heart rate zones and gradually build up your ability to run at your desired goal marathon pace.

If you miss days through work, holiday, sickness or injury, don't try to play catch-up. Step back into the plan where you left off, and be patient. If you feel you need to catch up, check out our cross-training tips in the Running Guide ... don't just add more running unless you are ready.

4 Is this everything I need to know?

No – this plan is supported by our Running Guide, which gives more detail on the structure of the running sessions and top tips on nutrition and recovery to leave you fitter, stronger and more energised as you progress through your training journey.



Notes

Always include a 10 minute easy warm up and cool down either side of 'threshold', 'hill' or 'interval' efforts. Check out our Running Guide for our top core exercises and stretches. Remember to stretch well after every run.

'FEELING' YOUR SESSIONS



The feeling of not being sure how fast you should be running for any particular session is common, from beginners to elite athletes. For beginners it never feels as though running is easy but we can assure you that running doesn't need to be hard all the time. There are a number of different paces that you should aim to master which will make up your training:

Easy runs

Fully conversational at the speed of chat and about 6/10 effort.

At the beginning all you are trying to do is get out and run. That should be at easy pace or 'the speed of chat' – if you can't talk as you are running, you're going too fast. For the more experienced runner, 'the speed of chat' is how your easy and recovery runs should feel – totally in control and relaxed. If you are combining walking and running, the effort level remains the same – you should be able to hold a conversation on both the walking and running segments

Steady runs

Conversational, controlled but working at about 7/10 effort.

Faster than easy, conversational running is 'steady running'. This is the backbone of training for more experienced runners. This is where you must be honest and not push too hard or you might ruin your faster sessions, so conversation should still be possible, but a little strained.

Threshold runs

Controlled discomfort and 3-4 word answer pace 8/10 effort.

Incorporating threshold running is how the elites train. This is where you are running at a controlled discomfort level. You can still talk between breaths, but only 3 or 4 word phrases. This is not running to exhaustion or sprinting. You may already feel able to include some 3-5 minute blocks into a run each week which will grow in volume throughout your training as per your training plan.

Interval runs

3k-5k-10k effort or 9/10 effort.

Interval training and 5k/10k pace is top-end training. This is often called the 'hurt locker' and is used in training to replicate the feeling at the end of a hard race. The effort levels here should be almost at maximum.



GLOSSARY

Here you will find a glossary of the terms used in our training plans.

Continuous Hills (CH)

Hill running develops strength in your muscles and tendons without putting them under the type of stress they are exposed to during faster running. Run up a 5-10% gradient for 45-90 seconds at a 'threshold effort'. Turn immediately at the top and run down the hill at the same effort, then turn at the bottom and repeat without any recovery until the rep time ends. Like a tempo/threshold run, a hill session is time to concentrate, as you should be working at about 80–85% of MHR and be able to utter just a few words.

Cross-Training & Core Conditioning (XT)

It is important that your training is balanced with some non-impact activities such as swimming, cycle and rowing. Without this you are more likely to pick up an injury that will set your training back. Endurance running, especially the marathon, requires whole body conditioning. To achieve this you should aim to work a variety of muscle groups and not just your legs.

Fartlek (F)

This is a Swedish term that literally means "speed play". It involves a number of bursts of effort over a variety of distances with a variable recovery. Originally the length of effort was based on the terrain, for example, pushing harder every time you came to a climb, no matter how long it was. You can adapt it for your needs.

Interval Training (IT)

Intervals help to boost specific race pace speed and involve running timed efforts with a controlled recovery. The effort level is around 85–100% of MHR, depending on the duration of the event you are training for and the length and volume of intervals used. A typical example might be 6 x 3 minutes @ 5km race pace with a 90 second jog recovery.

Maximum Heart Rate (MHR)

To make sure you increase your fitness and strength safely, it is important that you increase your heart rate to the right level while you are exercising. This means working out a safe range for your heart rate when you are taking exercise. To do this, you first need to work out your maximum heart rate. The maximum heart rate depends on your age. One way to work out your maximum heart rate is to take your age away from 220.

Long Runs (LR)

Long runs are vital in your plan and key to racing well in long distance races from 5km – marathon. At first, concentrate on increasing the time on your feet rather than worrying about distance. Start off by heading out for at least an hour and run at a conversational pace or 6/10 effort. Gradually this will build to 75% of WHR as you start to practice periods of marathon or race pace running. These runs improve your muscular endurance and condition your body to burn fat as its primary fuel source.

Marathon Pace (MP)

Understanding the pace and effort you intend on running your marathon at is very important. Pace judgment and patience on the big day will be crucial to running your best marathon. Marathon pace practice allows your body and mind to get used to what will be required on race day, and it builds endurance quickly.

Recovery Run (RR)

Training for endurance requires your body to work harder than it has ever done. To see improvement without breaking down, you'll need some recovery runs. These should be nice and easy and you should feel relaxed. Enjoy the scenery. You should be breathing easily and be capable of holding a conversation throughout the run. This will mean that you are running in the 60–65% range of your MHR and it should be no more than 45 minutes in duration. It also helps with the removal of the waste products which accumulate in your muscles after harder efforts.

Rest (R)

To help your body cope with the workload, rest is going to be as important a part of your training schedule as the running itself. Listen to your body and take heed of any warning signs. If you feel fatigued even before you've run a step, find yourself thinking up excuses not to run or start suffering a series of minor injuries; you probably need more time off. Taking enough rest allows physical and mental recovery and gives your body the time to adapt to your workload.

Threshold Runs (THR)

After the long run threshold runs are probably your most valuable workouts. They are run at a controlled brisk pace, about 80–85% of your MHR, you'll only be capable of uttering a couple of words to your training partners. Tempo/threshold runs improve your lactate threshold (the speed above which your body struggles to cope with the lactic acid created by burning energy without oxygen), your running economy and aerobic capacity.

Warming Up/Warm Down (WU/WD)

When you are going to do any faster training such as hills or threshold runs, it is important to warm up gradually. A 10-15 minute jog gets your muscles warm and improves your range of movement.

Marathon beginner training plan / 1

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1	Rest	Easy run: 30 mins run.	Core conditioning	Threshold run: 30 mins to include 3 x 6 mins at threshold, 2 mins jog/walk recoveries.	Rest	Easy run: 30 mins run + core.	Long run: 45 mins total to include 20 mins easy, 5 mins walk if needed x 2.
2	Rest	Easy run: 30 mins run.	Core conditioning	Continuous hills: 40 mins to include 3 x 6 mins at effort, 90 secs jog/walk recoveries.	Rest	Easy run: 30 mins run + core.	Long run: 60 mins total to include 25 mins easy, 5 mins walk if needed x 2.
3	Rest	Threshold run: 40 mins to include 3 x 5 mins at threshold, 2 mins jog recoveries.	Core conditioning	Continuous hills: 40 mins to include 4 x 5 mins at effort, 90 secs jog recoveries.	Rest	Easy run: 30 mins run + core.	Long run: 75 mins total to include 3 x 5 mins walk, 20 mins easy run.
4	Rest	Easy run: 20 mins continuous run.	Core conditioning	Progression run: 10 mins easy, 10 mins steady, 10 mins threshold effort.	Rest	Time trial Parkrun or self timed 5km.	Long run: 45-60 mins with a short walk break after 30 mins.
5	Rest	Threshold run: 45 mins to include 4 x 5 mins at threshold, 2 mins jog recoveries.	Core conditioning	Continuous hills: 45 mins to include 3 x 7 mins at effort, 2 mins recoveries.	Rest	Easy run: 30-40 mins run + core.	Long run: 90 mins total, walk for 5 mins every 20 mins if necessary.
6	Rest	Threshold run: 45 mins to include 5 x 5 mins at threshold, 2 mins jog recoveries.	Core conditioning	Continuous hills: 50 mins to include 3 x 8 mins at effort, 2 mins recoveries.	Rest	Easy run: 30-40 mins run + core.	Long run: 1hr 45 mins total, walk for 5 mins every 30 mins if necessary.

Marathon beginner training plan / 2

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7	Rest	Threshold run: 45 mins to include 2 x 10 mins at threshold, 3 mins jog recoveries.	Core conditioning	Continuous hills: 50 mins to include 3 x 10 mins at effort, 2 mins jog recoveries.	Rest	Easy run: 40 mins run + core.	Long run: 2hrs easy pace total. Walk for 5 mins every 30 mins if necessary.
8	Rest	Threshold run: 50 mins to include 3 x 8 mins at threshold, 2 mins jog recoveries.	Core conditioning	Progression run: 45 mins run aiming to pick up the pace in the final 25 mins.	Rest	Easy run: 40 mins run + core.	Long run: 2hrs 15 mins easy pace total. Walk for 5 mins every 30 mins if necessary.
9	Rest	Progression run: 30 minutes as 10 mins easy, 10 mins steady, 10 mins threshold.	Core conditioning	Easy run: 30-40 mins pace run.	Rest	Easy run: 20 mins run.	Half marathon: Ideal day for a half marathon or 2 hour 30-45 mins run with the last 60 mins at planned marathon pace
10	Rest	Easy run: 30-40 mins run.	Core conditioning	Marathon pace practice: 60 mins total, last 40 mins at target MP.	Rest	Easy run: 40-50 run + core.	Long run: 2hrs 30 mins easy pace total. Walk for 5 mins every 30 mins if necessary.
11	Rest	Threshold run: 60 mins to include 3 x 10 mins at threshold, 2 mins jog recoveries.	Core conditioning	Progression run: 60-70 mins with the final 25 mins at threshold effort.	Rest	Easy run: 40-50 run + core.	Long run: 2hrs 45 mins easy pace total. Last 60 mins at MP. Walk for 5 mins every 30 mins if necessary.

Marathon beginner training plan / 3

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
12	Rest	Easy run: 45-60 mins run.	Core conditioning	Threshold run: 70 mins with 6 x 6 mins at threshold effort, with 90-120 secs brisk walk or jog recoveries.	Rest	Easy run: 40-50 mins run + core	Long run: 3 hours - 3 hours 15 mins at steady pace with short walk breaks each 30-40 mins if needed. Practice race kit and fuelling.
13	Rest	Intervals: 6 x 3 mins with the odd numbers at threshold effort, the even numbers faster, with 90 secs walk recoveries.	Core conditioning	Progression run: 70 mins with the final 20-30 mins at threshold effort.	Rest	Easy run: 40-50 mins run + core	Long run: 3 hours 15mins - 3 hours 30 mins total, easy pace with last 60-75 mins at planned marathon effort. Walk for 5 mins every 30 mins if necessary.
14	Rest	Intervals: 8 x 3 mins with the odd numbers at threshold effort, the even numbers faster, with 90 secs walk recoveries.	Core conditioning	Intervals: 75 mins with 45 mins at planned marathon effort.	Rest	Easy run: 40-50 mins run + core	Long run: 2 hours easy pace, pick up to steady pace in final 30 mins.
15	Rest	Intervals: 40 mins to include 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 mins starting at threshold effort progressing to a hard pace, with 90 secs jogs.	Core conditioning	Easy run: 45 mins run.	Rest	Parkrun: or 30 mins steady run + core	Long run: 75 mins easy run.
16	Rest	Easy run: 30 mins including 3 x 5 mins at threshold effort, 3 mins jog recoveries.	Core conditioning	Easy run: 25-30 mins run.	Rest	Easy run: 25 mins super easy.	Marathon race day: Good luck!

Important notes



Warm ups and cool downs

It is important to do a 15 minute warm-up and cool-down before threshold, continuous hills or interval sessions.



Morning recovery

If you're feeling OK, you may wish to consider a 20–30 minute recovery run in the morning before any of the quality sessions above.



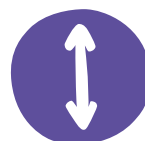
Cross Training

Always substitute running for cross training if you are injured, very sore or it's not safe to run.



Core conditioning

Please add core conditioning, pilates or yoga classes once or twice a week if you have time.



Stretch

Try to stretch every day for at least 10 minutes.



Eat

Always eat within 20–30 minutes of finishing a run.



Pacing

Always train at the specified paces; don't compromise or run too hard. Tiredness always catches up, so take extra rest if required.

Contact

We're here for you

For support, information or if you just want to chat, call us free on 0300 100 0200 (Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm) or visit macmillan.org.uk



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