

Great Races for First-Time Marathoners

During my first marathon, in New York City, I went to the starting line with a new friend, Rich Kenah. Rich was a professional 800-meter runner and earned a bronze medal in the 1993 World Indoor Championships for the United States. He had been training for the marathon for a few months and gave me a useful piece of advice just minutes before the race began. He leaned over and said, "Today is just another long run with 30,000 new friends." His memorable comment came at the perfect time. It took a little pressure off and reminded me that this was in fact not a race, but rather an event containing thousands of individual stories, from a bunch of people with the same goal: to cross the notorious finish line in Central Park. As I've traveled around the world, experiencing different marathons, I'm always intrigued to hear about them from the perspective of other runners.

If you plan to only run just one marathon in your life, to simply check off that box on your bucket list, then I encourage you to go big and run a well-known, participant-pleasing marathon to keep you motivated and smiling over the miles. The Rock 'n' Roll race series, for example, offers

marathons in places around the globe and is a great way to experience running through a major city. They offer live music with bands at every mile along the course to help keep you moving and focused on the "fun" aspect of the sport.

United States

1
LOS ANGELES MARATHON, CALIFORNIA
(third Sunday in March)
In 2011, the Los Angeles Marathon introduced its now iconic Stadium-to-the-Sea course (Dodger Stadium to Santa Monica Beach). This rolling course is a brilliant tour of the warm Southern California city.

2
CHICAGO MARATHON, ILLINOIS
(second Sunday in October)
Speed alert! This marathon is home to many American and world records, thanks to its lightning-fast course that loops through the city and starts and finishes in Grant Park. It typically has great weather conditions, too, making Chicago an easy choice for a big-city marathon experience.

3
NEW YORK CITY MARATHON, NEW YORK
(first Sunday in November)
Two words: *iconic experience*. There is no other marathon in the world like this. New York City brings the energy, every single time. There are one million fans cheering so loudly along First Avenue that it will make the hair on the back of your neck stand up for miles. The only negative is that this race has one of the most competitive marathon registration lotteries.

4
HONOLULU MARATHON, HAWAII
(second Sunday in December)
This tropical event is perfect for those who want to fit a Hawaiian vacation in around their first marathon. The course has a few moderate hills to navigate while it circles around Diamond Head on the island of Oahu.

5
PHILADELPHIA MARATHON, PENNSYLVANIA
(third Sunday in November)
Another fast-course alert! This race is a great opportunity to run on a flat course with good

weather through a beautiful city filled with fun crowds. This marathon competes for athletes with the New York City Marathon every fall, as the neighboring cities host their races around the same time.

International

1
TOKYO MARATHON, JAPAN
(last Sunday in February)
A true destination event, this race has a course that's designed for fast times with a couple of manageable inclines thrown in. The weather is typically very runner-friendly, with cool, damp temps in the low- to mid-50s.

2
LONDON MARATHON, UNITED KINGDOM
(third Sunday in April)
Many national and world records have been set on this lightning-fast, pancake-flat course. It's also filled with a ridiculous number of historic landmarks, such as Tower Bridge, the Palace of Westminster, and Big Ben.

3
OTTAWA MARATHON, CANADA
(fourth Sunday in May)
This race, hosted by our friendly neighbors to the north, has been a staple for US athletes since 1974, with a mostly flat loop course that takes you on a tour of the capital.

4
BERLIN MARATHON, GERMANY
(fourth Sunday in September)
This just might be the fastest course on the planet, home to the current men's world record. The participants pass through where the Berlin Wall once stood and finish with a run through the historic Brandenburg Gate.

5
ATHENS MARATHON, GREECE
(second Sunday in November)
If you want to go straight to the source, well, this hilly course is where it all started.

Your marathon success depends on the accumulation of training over the 20-week season. Your training and your history as a runner will get you across the finish line.

Remember why you signed up to run a marathon in the first place. Frequently remind yourself of the challenge and the goals you've set for yourself—this will help keep you motivated as you train.

Keep a training log of all of your workouts and miles. Before race day, flip through it all to remind yourself of how hard you've worked over the last five to six months. Know that you have every reason to finish strong and happy.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL TRAINING

Before you start the training plan in this book, get comfortable running 25 to 35 miles per week.

This weekly mileage will serve as a solid base of running to build from. If you're not there yet, then work your way up slowly and gradually by adding 5 to 10 minutes to each of your daily runs.

Be patient with your training and the progress.

One of the biggest mistakes people make when starting a running program is to go out too quickly in the first couple of weeks. Later in the book, I will talk about the importance of pacing yourself and how to do it successfully (page 35).

Take recovery, or “off,” days seriously. This is important to stay healthy and injury-free when training. I usually recommend taking complete “off” days from running or cross-training after very hard or very long training sessions to allow your body to absorb the training stress and make the necessary cellular adaptations to become stronger.

You'll need to allocate time in your schedule to meet the daily training goals. This might mean waking up earlier to get your training run in before heading off to work. Also, select a day, usually Saturday or Sunday, when you can make time for a two- to four-hour-long aerobic run each week.

Plan for the weather. If you are scheduled to run a fall marathon, you'll be training in the summer. Plan your long runs and hard training sessions for the coolest times of the day. Check the weather forecast during your training and strategize your sessions. The same goes for the winter months if you're training for a spring marathon . . . dress appropriately (a few layers!) and plan your workouts for the warmest times of day.

Invest in your body. Since you've already invested in this race with the entry fee, your shoes, and your travel expenses, you should book your sports massage therapy appointments now. One massage a month should do the trick. Receiving sports massage therapy on a regular basis increases your chances of a successful, injury-free marathon buildup.

Run on trails as much as possible. The marathon will likely be on pavement, but doing most of your training runs on trails or dirt paths could help minimize the impact forces caused by running and the risk of injury during the training cycle. If you live in an area with limited access to trails, then invest in some cushy shoe insoles from your local running store.

Keep your training runs enjoyable. Mix in some different types of training runs during your marathon buildup. Venture out and explore new routes; download some new music to listen to during your workouts; tackle hills, flats, and everything in between; or simply run with new people to help beat the boredom caused by doing the same-old, same-old.

If you do your long runs alone, it might be a great idea to download an audiobook or podcast and learn a little something along the way. Just one caveat: If you run in the city or on a bike path, keep the volume low enough so that you can hear vehicular or bike traffic coming toward you.

Know that marathon training ebbs and flows. Some weeks will be great and feel easy, while others will inevitably be a struggle. Some mornings you'll wake up feeling energized, ready to tackle a long run, and other mornings you'll stay in bed a little longer than you meant to (it's so cozy!). It's all a good lesson for the race itself, though. Even when you have a challenging minute (or mile), you can trust that there will be a positive stretch ahead as well.

ASK A PRO

SARAH ATTAR, TWO-TIME OLYMPIC MARATHONER

What advice would you give to first-time marathoners?



Part of the draw of running a marathon is the intimidation factor. It may be farther than you've ever run, and you know it will be difficult, but you also know that it's possible. A phrase I continually keep in mind is “respect the long run.”

I find myself repeating this phrase in big training blocks before Sunday's long run and before the race. It reminds me of that intimidation factor, that I am about to take on this big daunting thing, but it also has this element of confidence and understanding. When we acknowledge the grandeur, we acknowledge that this task will command the best from us, allowing us to properly prepare and approach. With this phrase in mind, I find myself staying on top of sleep, eating the right foods the night before, putting in the necessary miles to be as prepared as possible, and really paying attention to all of the details in training that will allow me to honor this race.

Mountain Climbers

Start in a plank position with your palms on the floor under your shoulders and your legs extended behind you, abs engaged, back flat, and toes tucked under. Bring your left knee in toward your chest, keeping your right leg straight, and tap your toes on the floor. Keeping your hands on the ground, abs tight, and body low to the ground, hop to switch legs, so your right knee is forward and left leg is back. Continue alternating sides for a few reps.

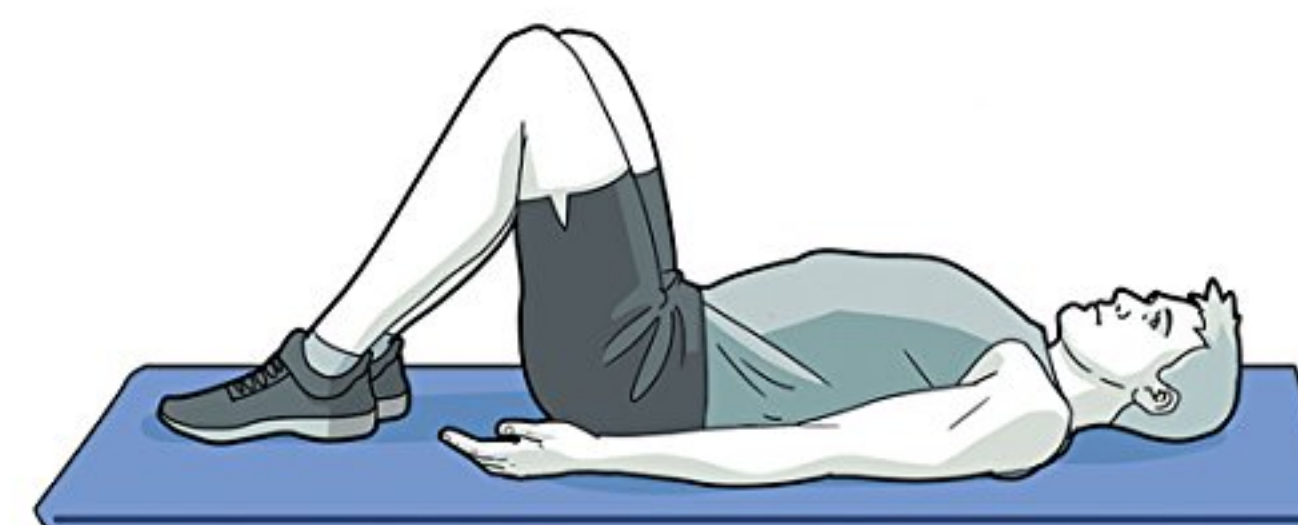


Wall Sit

Brace yourself! Stand with your back against a wall, and then walk your feet forward about 6 to 12 inches. Slowly slide your back down the wall until your thighs are parallel to the ground and knees are bent to 90 degrees. You may have to walk your feet out a few inches to make sure your knees are just above your ankles. Hold this position for 30 to 60 seconds.

Bicycle

Lie faceup on the floor with your knees bent over your hips, your fingers interlaced behind your head, and your elbows out to your sides. Keeping your right knee bent, extend your left leg down toward the floor, as you lift your upper body off the floor and rotate your torso to your left, bringing your left elbow to your right knee. Rotate your torso back through center to your right; switch legs and arms and repeat. Continue alternating, as if you were pedaling a bike.



Bridge

Lie faceup on the floor with your knees bent, feet flat on floor, and arms extended by your sides. Slowly lift your hips off the floor, keeping your head, shoulders, and arms down, forming a diagonal line from your knees to your shoulders; hold for a few seconds, and then lower back down to the starting position; repeat.

WEEK 5

After this week, you'll be 20% done with your training. Can you believe it?! It's the equivalent of running the first six miles of the marathon. You should be feeling warmed up by now, and well on your way to finding a groove in your training.

Your weekly volume is slowly ticking up by 10 to 12% this week. We are now in the zone of that famous 10% increase per week rule. Your muscles, tendons, and bones are getting stronger and stronger. To help reduce the impact of repetitive pounding on the road, however, I do recommend that you try to perform a few of your training runs on a dirt path or trail each week. If this is not possible, then consider running on the shorter end of my daily mileage recommendations.

Keep in mind that you want to get to your long run feeling as rested as possible, as you're now well into the double digits mileage-wise. Try

to dedicate 30 to 60 minutes to your recovery every night this week.

With the slow, aerobic miles really starting to accumulate now, it is important to keep up with your stretching. Aim to stretch three to four times each week after your runs. Your midweek strides will also help to increase your flexibility and stride length.

During this week's long run, be sure to consume the beverage you'll be drinking on race day, sipping four to five ounces every 20 to 30 minutes. Carry a bottle with you and set your watch to beep every 20 to 30 minutes as a reminder to drink your fluids. By consuming fluids with sugar and electrolytes, you will recover faster and be better prepared to get back to work the following week.

This week, you are running more miles than the actual marathon distance! It's an accomplishment worth noting that you should truly be proud of.

| WEEK 5 | TYPE OF RUN | TOTAL MILEAGE | NOTES |
|----------------------|---|---------------|--|
| M | Off Day (complete rest) | N/A | Take this day to allow your body to absorb the training from the previous week. This day will rejuvenate your body for the training week ahead! |
| Tu | Aerobic Base Run | 4–5 miles | This run is to be performed at a low, aerobic intensity (60–70% of max heart rate), a conversational pace, or 45–60 seconds slower than GMRP. The aerobic base run helps develop a robust aerobic system, increasing your fat-burning capabilities. |
| W | Aerobic Base Run | 4–5 miles | This run is to be performed at a low, aerobic intensity (60–70% of max heart rate), a conversational pace, or 45–60 seconds slower than GMRP. The aerobic base run helps develop a robust aerobic system, increasing your fat-burning capabilities. |
| Th | Aerobic Base Run, plus 5× Strides (relaxed sprints) | 4–5 miles | Perform your easy run of 4–5 miles. Then find a nice stretch of road with solid footing to perform your strides afterward. |
| F | Off Day/ Cross-Training for 30–45 minutes | N/A | Either take the day off from training or cross-train to further the development of your cardiovascular system. The activity you choose should be nonimpact (biking, swimming, using an elliptical, etc.). Keep the effort aerobic and easy (60–70% of max heart rate). |
| Sat | Aerobic Base Run | 4–5 miles | This run is to be performed at a low, aerobic intensity (60–70% of max heart rate), a conversational pace, or 45–60 seconds slower than GMRP. The aerobic base run helps develop a robust aerobic system, increasing your fat-burning capabilities. |
| Sun | Aerobic Long Run | 11–12 miles | The long run should be performed at an easy effort (60–65% of max heart rate), a conversational pace, or 45–60 seconds slower than GMRP. Remember to bring fluids along and take a sip every 15–25 minutes. |
| TOTAL WEEKLY MILEAGE | | 27–32 miles | The increase in mileage from week 4 (24–29 miles) to this week is 10–12%. |



APPENDIX

PREDICTING YOUR RACE TIME

| 1 MILE | 5K | 10K | 10 MILES | ½ MAR | MARATHON |
|--------|-------|---------|----------|---------|----------|
| 6:00 | 19:57 | 41:36 | 1:08:53 | 1:31:47 | 3:11:22 |
| 6:15 | 20:47 | 43:20 | 1:11:46 | 1:35:37 | 3:19:21 |
| 6:30 | 21:37 | 45:04 | 1:14:38 | 1:39:26 | 3:27:19 |
| 6:45 | 22:27 | 46:48 | 1:17:30 | 1:43:16 | 3:35:18 |
| 7:00 | 23:17 | 48:32 | 1:20:22 | 1:47:05 | 3:43:16 |
| 7:15 | 24:07 | 50:16 | 1:23:14 | 1:50:55 | 3:51:15 |
| 7:30 | 24:56 | 52:00 | 1:26:07 | 1:54:44 | 3:59:13 |
| 7:45 | 25:46 | 53:44 | 1:28:59 | 1:58:34 | 4:07:11 |
| 8:00 | 26:36 | 55:28 | 1:31:51 | 2:02:23 | 4:15:10 |
| 8:15 | 27:26 | 57:12 | 1:34:43 | 2:06:13 | 4:23:08 |
| 8:30 | 28:16 | 58:56 | 1:37:36 | 2:10:02 | 4:31:07 |
| 8:45 | 29:06 | 1:00:40 | 1:40:28 | 2:13:51 | 4:39:05 |

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