GoalTodo

Marathon training plan: 18 weeks from 10K, 16 from a half

Marathon

18 weeks · Mon, Nov 30 → Sun, Apr 4

Week by week

Tick a box each time you do a session.

Nov 30–Dec 6
Week 1

Three easy runs

Base

- [ ] [ ] Easy run — 30 min
- [ ] Long run — 10 km

Done when: You run all three sessions at a pace where you can talk in full sentences

Sticking point: Easy means slower than you think. If you can't talk, slow down or walk for a minute.

Dec 7–13
Week 2

Twelve kilometres

Base

- [ ] [ ] Easy run — 35 min
- [ ] Long run — 12 km

Done when: You run 12 km at a pace where you can talk

Dec 14–20
Week 3

Ease off and recover

Lighter week

- [ ] [ ] Easy run — 30 min
- [ ] Long run — 9 km

Done when: You run all three sessions, with a long run of 9 km

Sticking point: Lighter weeks feel too easy. Run them anyway: this is when your body catches up with the training.

Dec 21–27
Week 4

Fourteen kilometres

Build

- [ ] [ ] Easy run — 35 min
- [ ] Long run — 14 km

Done when: You run 14 km at a pace where you can talk

Dec 28–Jan 3
Week 5

Sixteen kilometres

Build

- [ ] Easy run
  40 min
- [ ] Long run
  16 km

Done when: You run 16 km at a pace where you can talk

Sticking point: Longer runs need water. Carry some on any run over an hour.

Jan 4–10
Week 6

Ease off and recover

Lighter week

- [ ] Easy run
  35 min
- [ ] Long run
  12 km

Done when: You run all three sessions, with a long run of 12 km

Sticking point: Keep this week easy, even if you feel great. Lighter weeks are when the training sinks in.

Jan 11–17
Week 7

Eighteen kilometres

Build

- [ ] Easy run
  40 min
- [ ] Long run
  18 km

Done when: You run 18 km at a pace where you can talk

Sticking point: Long runs now last two hours or more. Practise taking energy on them: see "Energy and water" below.

Jan 18–24
Week 8

Half marathon distance

Build

- [ ] Easy run
  45 min
- [ ] Long run
  21.1 km

Done when: You run 21.1 km, half the race distance

Sticking point: A half marathon race nearby makes a good rehearsal this week. Run it at your easy pace, not flat out.

Jan 25–31
Week 9

Ease off and recover

Lighter week

- [ ] Easy run — 40 min
- [ ] Long run — 14 km

Done when: You run all three sessions, with a long run of 14 km

Feb 1–7
Week 10

Twenty-four kilometres

Build

- [ ] Easy run — 45 min
- [ ] Long run — 24 km

Done when: You run 24 km at a pace where you can talk

Sticking point: If something hurts or doesn't feel right, stop. Take an extra rest day rather than run through it.

Feb 8–14
Week 11

Twenty-six kilometres

Build

- [ ] Easy run — 50 min
- [ ] Long run — 26 km

Done when: You run 26 km at a pace where you can talk

Feb 15–21
Week 12

Ease off and recover

Lighter week

- [ ] Easy run — 40 min
- [ ] Long run — 19 km

Done when: You run all three sessions, with a long run of 19 km

Feb 22–28
Week 13

Twenty-nine kilometres

Build

- [ ] Easy run — 50 min
- [ ] Long run — 29 km

Done when: You run 29 km at a pace where you can talk

Sticking point: Practise race morning on this run: the same breakfast, kit, shoes and energy you'll race with.

Mar 1–7
Week 14

Ease off and recover

Lighter week

- [ ] Easy run — 45 min
- [ ] Long run — 21 km

Done when: You run all three sessions, with a long run of 21 km

Mar 8–14
Week 15

The longest run: 32 km

Peak

- [ ] Easy run — 50 min
- [ ] Long run — 32 km

Done when: You run 32 km at a pace where you can talk, walking breaks allowed

Sticking point: You don't need to run 42.2 km before race day. The taper and the crowd carry you the rest of the way.

Mar 15–21
Week 16

Less running, same easy pace

Taper

- [ ] Easy run — 40 min
- [ ] Long run — 19 km

Done when: You run all three sessions, with a long run of 19 km at a pace where you can talk

Sticking point: Less running can feel like losing fitness. It isn't: your legs are recovering for race day.

Mar 22–28
Week 17

Shorter again

Taper

- [ ] [ ] Easy run — 30 min
- [ ] Long run — 13 km

Done when: You run all three sessions, with a long run of 13 km at a pace where you can talk

Mar 29–Apr 4
Week 18

Two short runs, then the race

Race week

- [ ] [ ] Easy run — 20 min
- [ ] Marathon — 42.2 km

Done when: You cross the finish line

Sticking point: Nerves make people start too fast. Run the first 10 km slower than feels right.

How the plan works

You run three times a week: two easy runs on Tuesday and Thursday, and a long run on Sunday. Keep a rest day between runs. You can move the days, as long as the long run stays on its own day with rest either side.

Easy means you can talk. Run every session, the long run too, at a pace where you could hold a conversation. Walking for a minute is always allowed, and plenty of first-time marathoners run-walk the whole race.

The long run grows by two or three kilometres at a time, to a longest run of 32 km three weeks before the race. You don't need to run 42.2 km before race day: the taper and the crowd do the rest.

Almost every third week is lighter, with one more lighter week just before the longest run. The runs get shorter so your body can catch up. Don't skip these weeks or turn them into hard ones.

The last three weeks are the taper. You run less, at the same easy pace, so you start the race rested. The London Marathon's medical advice suggests about 80% of your usual running three weeks out, 60% two weeks out and about a third in race week.

Pick your level by what you can run today. "I've run a half marathon" starts with a 14 km long run in week 1. If your half marathon wasn't recent and you can't comfortably run 12 to 14 km now, start with "I can run 10K".

If you can't run 10K yet, build up to it first. The 10K and half marathon plans get you there, and a half marathon is a good first race on the way.

Before you start

Speak to a GP before you start, especially if you have a health condition, a family history of heart problems, or you're worried about your health.

Stop and get checked if you have chest pain, unusual breathlessness, palpitations or dizziness while running. Don't ignore anything unusual.

Don't run with a fever, flu or a stomach bug. Start again slowly once you're better.

Start every run with a 5-minute warm-up walk, and end it with a 5-minute cool-down walk.

Listen to your body. If something hurts, rest it, and see a doctor or physiotherapist if it doesn't settle.

Gear

▪ Running shoes that support your feet. A running shop can help you choose. Wear them in on long runs, and don't race in a new pair.

▪ Clothes you can move in, and a supportive sports bra if you need one. Anti-chafe balm matters on runs over two hours.

▪ A watch or phone to time your runs and walks.

▪ Water for any run over an hour, carried in a hand bottle or a belt.

▪ Energy for long runs: gels, chews or a sports drink. See "Energy and water" below.

▪ Something reflective if you run in the dark, and routes that are well lit.

Energy and water

▪ On your longest runs, take a little energy as you go: a gel, a few chews or some sports drink. Start before you feel you need it.

▪ Practise on your long runs with what you'll use on race day. Check the race website to see what's handed out on the course.

▪ Drink to thirst, not more. Drinking too much water can be dangerous. You'll need more on a hot day, less on a cool one.

▪ In the last two days, eat familiar meals with plenty of carbohydrate, such as pasta, rice, bread or potatoes. Leave out anything new or spicy.

▪ Eat a breakfast you've tried before on long-run mornings, leaving time to digest before you start. Use the same one on race day.

Common mistakes

▪ Running the easy runs too fast. If you can't talk, you're running too fast. Slow down, or walk.

▪ Catching up on missed runs. Don't squeeze two runs into one day or add the missed kilometres to the long run. See "If you fall behind" below.

▪ Skipping the lighter weeks. They are part of the plan, not a break from it.

▪ Adding more. Building up gradually is what keeps you running. Extra runs and faster long runs make injury more likely, not the race easier.

▪ Running through pain. A few days off now is better than weeks off later.

▪ Trying something new on race day: new shoes, a new breakfast or a new energy gel. Try everything on a long run first.

Race week

▪ Run the two short easy runs and nothing else. No long run this week.

▪ Sleep well all week, not only the night before.

▪ The night before, lay out your kit, pin on your number and charge your watch. Write your emergency contact on the back of your number.

▪ Eat the breakfast you've practised on your long runs, at the same time before the start.

▪ If you're ill on race day, don't run. There will be other marathons.

▪ Start slower than you think you should. Run the first 10 km at your easy pace, then decide.

- Walking at the drinks stations is fine. Many runners do it.
- After the finish, keep walking for a few minutes, then drink and eat a little.

If you fall behind

Missed 1 week: Carry on with the current week, but keep the long run at the distance of the last one you finished. Don't add the missed runs on top.

Missed 2 weeks: Repeat the last week you finished in full, then carry on from there. If that runs past race day, leave out a week before the peak, never the three taper weeks.

Missed 3 weeks: Go back three weeks from where you stopped and build up again. If there are no longer enough weeks, enter your race date on the plan page to see if it's still realistic, or pick a later race.

Missed 4 or more weeks: Your fitness has dropped. Choose the level that matches what you can run today, and enter a new race date on the plan page to see if it's realistic. Ask your race if you can defer your place or switch to a shorter distance.

Sources

Hal Higdon
`https://www.halhigdon.com/training-programs/marathon-training/novice-1-marathon/`
"Notice that although the weekly long runs get progressively longer, every third week is a "stepback" week, where we reduce mileage to allow you to gather strength for the next push upward."

London Marathon Events
`https://www.londonmarathonevents.co.uk/london-marathon/medical-advice`
"Ease off in the last three weeks."

Nuffield Health
`https://www.nuffieldhealth.com/article/16-week-marathon-training-plan`
"This marathon plan is designed for a beginner marathon runner who has successfully completed the 5km, 10km, and half-marathon distances."

Mass General Brigham
`https://www.massgeneralbrigham.org/en/health-wellness/marathon-training-plan`
"Before signing up for a race, talk to your primary care provider (PCP)."

This plan online	`https://goaltodo.com/marathon`
Reach it with others on Welang	`https://welang.com/goals`
Reach it on your own in HourLife	`https://www.hourlife.com`

This plan is a guide, not medical advice. See a doctor before starting if you have a health condition, are pregnant, or haven't exercised in a long time.