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Full Marathon Intermediate Training

Contents

Introduction	3
Before you begin	3
Do you have the right training plan?	3
Before you begin...	4
Safety First	4
Health-status safety checklist	4
The Marathon	4
Getting Started	5
What gear do I need?	5
Shoes	5
Socks	5
Shorts and tights	6
Running tops	6
Hats	7
Gloves	7
Sports bras	7
Structuring your sessions	8
How to Stretch	9
Additional Training	10
Intermediate Marathon Training Plan	11
Program notes	11
Training pace guide	12
Terminology	12
Intermediate Marathon Training Plan	13
Conclusion	19
Well done!	19

Introduction

Before you begin

Congratulations, you’re running a marathon! From beginning your training, to lining up at the start and finishing, preparing for and running in the marathon is a fantastic experience that you will never forget. This intermediate training plan focuses on everything you need to get started, sensible precautions to take and also contains a week-by-week structured plan that will convert you to a fitter, healthier and successful marathon runner. However, before you don your running shoes and start that first training session, take a little time out to check a few safety considerations before you begin.

Do you have the right training plan?

It could be dangerous to follow the intermediate training plan if you are really a beginner runner. If the following applies to you, you have the correct plan. If your current level of running training is less than the following, you need the ‘Beginner Marathon Training Plan’.

Current level of running training	Approximate expected finishing time band
You are already a runner	3h 15m – 4h 30m
You have been running for a minimum of several months	
You have probably completed a 10k or half marathon event	
You are currently comfortable with training for approximately 4-5 hours per week	
You may have already completed a marathon and are looking to improve your time	

Before you begin...

From beginning your training, to lining up at the start and finishing, preparing for and running in the marathon is a fantastic experience that you will never forget. This intermediate training plan focuses on everything you need to get started, sensible precautions to take and it also contains a week-by-week structured plan. However, before you start that first training session, take a little time out to check a few safety considerations before you begin.

Safety First

To start with, it is vitally important to ensure that it is safe for you to begin an exercise program. Complete the safety checklist below and if you answer YES to one or more questions, or alternatively, if you are at all concerned about starting training, then make an appointment with your Doctor for a check-up before you start.



Health-status safety checklist

1	Are you aged over 30 and/or have not exercised for some time?	Y	N
2	Do you suffer from any medical conditions?	Y	N
3	Are you a smoker or have recently given up smoking?	Y	N
4	Have you undergone any surgery in the past two years?	Y	N
5	Are you suffering from any injuries?	Y	N
6	Are you currently on any prescribed medication?	Y	N
7	Are you unsure about beginning an exercise program?	Y	N

Once you have the all-clear from your doctor then you are ready to start training.

The Marathon

The marathon is one of life’s great challenges – and open to all! There are numerous marathon events all over the world and most international cities stage marathons. Whichever event you choose, stepping up to the challenge of training for and completing 26.2 miles is an incredible experience that you will never forget. Completing a marathon is a magnificent achievement wherever you finish in the field and this training plan steps you through to race day competitor and includes a multitude of tips and advice to help you reach your marathon goal.

Getting Started

What gear do I need?

To get started you need minimal equipment. Running is a very simple sport and requires very little specialist kit. The most important point is that you have suitable clothing (particularly footwear) and that you feel comfortable in everything. The most technical and most important things you need to buy are your running shoes.

Shoes

Correct footwear is one area where you should not compromise. Good running shoes are an investment in comfort, protection and injury prevention and it is worth visiting a specialist sports footwear retailer rather than a chain store and discussing your requirements with them. A specialist retailer with gait analysis and pressure plate testing will be able to assess your requirements and recommend suitable shoes for your particular gait and running style.



Insight

You want to be comfortable when you run so finding the correct shoe size is very important. When you shop for running shoes, always go in the afternoon because after lunch, your feet will have expanded a little.

Socks

Working upwards from the shoes, next you need some socks. These can be simple sports socks that can be picked up from most sports stores. However, if you get more serious about your running, it is wise to invest in some socks that have been specifically designed for running. These have been designed to wick away moisture and sweat from the foot so you don't slip and consequently suffer from blisters. Additionally, these types of socks are designed with more padding in certain areas for enhanced cushioning.



The most advanced socks are designed for the appropriate foot i.e. they are left and right foot specific. The specific foot socks have a great benefit in that they hug the foot better and there is no excess sock floating around in the shoe which may cause blisters.

Insight

Buy your socks before you buy your shoes. Socks come in a wide range of thicknesses, which can significantly affect the fit of your running shoes. Take the socks that you are going to train in along to the shoe retailer so that you get a perfect match.

Shorts and tights

After socks come shorts or when it is colder, tights. Shorts should be comfortable, lightweight and have the ability to wick away sweat when you train. Shorts come with just elastic waist bands or a draw string as well. It is worth getting a draw string as you can tie the shorts to get the perfect fit.

Elastic-only shorts often move down a little, especially in wet conditions. Your shorts shouldn't be so tight that they cut off circulation round your waist but conversely they shouldn't be so loose that they flap around all the time either.



When the weather is colder it is advisable to wear tights to keep your legs warmer and thus reduce the chance of injury. Running tights hug the legs more efficiently and stop the wind and rain affecting the leg itself. This helps in reducing injuries from cold muscles and also means that you can enjoy running when the weather is a little worse than ideal.

Your tights should be snug fitting and comfortable. It is important to try them on before you buy because many manufacturers have different cuts to suit different styles of runner.

Running tops

Running T-shirts should be reasonably tight but not figure-hugging and likewise they shouldn't flap around when you run in them. It is a fine balance between well fitted and slightly baggy that you should aim for. With long-sleeve T-shirts, you should aim to get ones with cuffed sleeves so they stay down around your wrists. If there are no cuffs then the sleeves often ride up your arms when you run and this can be both annoying and cold.

The mid to top range T-shirts all wick away sweat to keep you cooler and allow a greater air circulation through the fabric. They feel very lightweight but have the properties to keep you warm or cool depending on when and how you wear them. For hot weather singlets are the perfect option, but still go for wicking fabrics that also help air circulate around your body to aid cooling.



When the weather gets really cold or wet it is advisable to run in a long-sleeve waterproof top. These offer excellent wind-stopping and rain-resistance capabilities and can keep you warm and dry throughout any run. Sleeveless jackets are ideal for slightly warmer climates while full long-sleeve waterproofs are better for colder and wetter climates. Cheaper versions will be fine for most running conditions but they will sacrifice certain aspects like being 100% waterproof or windproof. Being prepared for cooler conditions enables you to stay warm, dry and enjoy the run more. In warmer climates wicking fabrics enable you to train harder by staying cooler and wicking away sweat and moisture from the body.

Hats

Hats are similar to gloves in that woollen ones are the norm because they are easy to get hold of and are cheap. Fleece materials offer wind-stopping capabilities and some are waterproof as well. Caps offer greater protection from the rain, snow and sun but often they can get blown off in windy conditions. They don't offer the same warmth capabilities as woollen/synthetic fabrics but they are good when you need better protection from the elements. In addition, they are better for runners who wear glasses because they help the glasses from getting rain or snow on.



Gloves

These should be lightweight and comfortable. Only in extreme weather will you need to wear thick running gloves and more often than not you will heat up enough to be okay in the normal thin type. Woollen gloves are the norm because they are cheap to buy, but they don't offer the same waterproof and wind-stopper capabilities of synthetic fabrics. Woollen gloves will be fine for most runners but if you are venturing out into colder or wetter climates, it is worth investing in a more advanced pair. Running with cold hands can ruin the experience for you, so choose carefully when you buy, especially if it is near wintertime.



Sports bras

It is important to wear a sports bra that fits you snugly and gives adequate support for running. Everyone is different and you may well need to try on a few different products before finding what is just right for you.

So does your sports bra fit?

- Your bra should fit snugly without being uncomfortably tight
- The bra should fit without any bulges around the sides
- The bra should fit without any bulges around the sides
- The shoulder straps should not dig in (wider straps can be more comfortable)
- When you run there should be significantly less bounce than with a normal bra



There are many excellent bras on the market, which come in a large range of sizes and colours offering every different level of support. Most women should only need to wear one sports bra even for high impact activities.

Structuring your sessions

Following correct exercise protocols is key to getting the most out of your training, so that you start out on the road to fitness with safe and correctly balanced training sessions. To get the most out of your training, you should adhere to the following sequence each time you train:

Warm Up

The warm up, raises the heart rate, gets blood flowing to the working muscles and prepares the body for exercise. It should be for a minimum of five minutes and replicate the movements or activities of the main session.

For example: when beginning a run, five minutes very easy jogging will prime the body for the main training session.

Mobility

Some basic actions to put the limbs through the range of movement that the main session requires will ensure that the joints are loosened up, lubricated and will function more efficiently.



Main Session

This will form the bulk of the training session. For example: a brisk 10-minute run.

Cool Down

The cool down should be at a lower intensity than the main session and should bring the body temperature and heart rate closer to pre-exercise levels. Waste by-products of exercise will be flushed from the muscles and tissues, accelerating recovery before the next training session.

For example: the cool-down should be a minimum of five to 10 minutes light CV. Jogging or walking is ideal.

Flexibility

Stretching exercises should be carried out after the main session and cool-down as the body is in a greater state of relaxation than at the beginning of the session. Five to 10 minutes spent stretching the muscles worked will maintain suppleness.

How to Stretch

To get the most out of your post exercise stretching session, simply follow the step-by-step guide below:

Relax

It is very important to be relaxed. Physical and mental tension will inhibit your range of movement and prevent your muscles from stretching as effectively. Hence, you will not achieve maximum flexibility benefits.

Ease into the stretch

Gradually move your body or the limb being stretched into the stretch position. Once you feel slight tension in the muscle, (known as the point of bind), which is the limit of the muscle's flexibility, hold the position. Avoid bouncing or any other movements, which could overstretch the muscle and result in injury.

Relax your breathing

Always keep your breathing easy and relaxed because that will reduce all-round muscular tension, which in turn will allow you to stretch further. Holding your breath will tense up your entire body, making stretching much harder.

Hold for 30 seconds

To get maximum stretching benefits, you need to hold the stretch for a minimum of 30 seconds. Stretching each muscle for just a few seconds brings no flexibility benefits.

Pain means no gain

Stretching should invoke a mild feeling of 'tightness' or tension within the stretched muscle. Pain when stretching indicates injury or a muscle that has been overstretched. Therefore, never stretch beyond a 'comfortable tightness'.

Rest and repeat

A single stretch for each muscle is very beneficial but if time permits, carry out two stretches for each muscle, separated by a short break of 30 seconds. The second stretch will help extend your range of movement further.

Frequency

Ideally stretch the major muscles after every run but if that proves too time-consuming, stretching twice a week is a suitable target.



Additional Training

Obviously running will form the core of all your training because you are training to condition your body to complete 26.2 miles under your own steam. However, it is also beneficial to incorporate other types of training in your program, so that you to the start line in the best possible shape.

Flexibility training

There are a multitude of flexibility exercises for stretching every muscle in the body. Primarily, you need to focus on leg stretches to keep your muscles long, supple and injury free. The key is to ensure that the muscles that have been utilised during your workout are stretched at the end of the training session.

For example: at the end of your run and cool down, spend a few minutes stretching the hamstrings, quadriceps, calves and adductors.



Cross-training

Cross-training is the name given to other forms of training that complement your running training. Cross-training can be extremely beneficial because it allows your body to recover from a run whilst still providing training benefits. Running is a very repetitive activity that if not carried out correctly, can lead to overuse injuries. By occasionally adding different activities to your program, you keep fresh and significantly reduce any injury risk.

For example: the day after a long endurance training run, a light swimming session or bike ride will still provide cardiovascular benefits but without the same loading on muscles that have been fatigued from running.



Resistance training (weight training)

Resistance training is extremely beneficial to complement your running; strengthening all around the body and correcting any muscle imbalances. The range of resistance training exercises for training specific muscles is immense, and can enhance your running performance through improved posture and all-round strength.

Specific resistance training sessions are not included in this program because as a new marathon runner it is important to focus as much as possible on building your endurance base for the challenge of running 26.2 miles. If you find that you have time to add in some resistance sessions to your training week, one to two workouts per week is ample.



Intermediate Marathon Training Plan

Program notes

This program is a day-by-day 16-week schedule. The program assumes:

- You are already a runner
- You have been running for a minimum of several months
- You have probably completed a 10k or half marathon event
- You are currently comfortable with training for approximately 4-5 hours per week
- You may have already completed a marathon and are looking to improve your time

For each session in the program, follow the protocols for warm-up, mobility, main session, cool-down and flexibility outlined earlier. Start at week one but if your training is slightly ahead, you can jump in at a later week. Simply check the week-by-week chart to see which week matches your current activity levels and then start at that point.

There is flexibility within the program for switching training sessions around during the week to fit in with your other commitments such as work, home, family etc. The key point is to ensure that your training is balanced each week, including flexibility, CV and rest.

Insight

Don't be a slave to the plan! The training program is designed with rest days, recovery sessions and lower volume weeks. This will ensure your body has time to adapt to the training. However, everyone is different and if you feel that an extra day's rest will be beneficial to your training, simply take out one of the shorter sessions in that week.

If you find it difficult to complete some weeks due to lack of training time, always try to complete the long run sessions. The most important factor with training for the marathon is to build endurance so try to complete all the long runs.

Training pace guide

Use the pace guide below to monitor the intensity of your training throughout each stage of the 8-week plan.

Type of training run	Intensity index 1=incredibly easy 10= incredibly hard	Description
Super slow	2	Really, really, slow; so easy it hardly seems worth putting your gear on.
Easy jog	3	No pressure, just loosening up or a recovery run.
Jog	4	Still an easy pace but a little faster than an easy jog.
Comfortable	5	You can talk easily to your training partner and keep the pace going.
Steady	6	Even paced run, can chat in short sentences.
Brisk	7	Slightly breathless pace, not easy to hold a conversation with your training partner.

Terminology

The program will frequently refer to the term ‘fartlek’. Fartlek is a Swedish word that means speed-play. A fartlek session is an unstructured, quality training session, where instead of running at a uniform pace, you vary the pace throughout the run, depending on how you feel. For example, a 70-minute fartlek session could be:

- Warm-up for 10 minutes
- Run hard for 10 minutes
- Alternately sprint and jog for 5 minutes
- Steady running for 10 minutes
- Race pace for 20 minutes
- 10 minutes cool-down

The key thing with a fartlek session is that you simply run as you feel, backing off when you start to tire, speeding up if and when you want to and for as long as you like.

Intermediate Marathon Training Plan

Week No.1	Getting Started	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	45 mins steady run	Try to maintain on even pace
Tues	Rest	
Wed	60 mins fartlek, ideally off-road	
Thurs	Rest	
Fri	60 mins easy	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	80 mins steady pace	Comfortable effort

Week No.2	Introducing mid-week quality	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	45 mins easy	
Tues	Rest	
Wed	3 x 8-10 mins hard, 3 minutes recovery between efforts, with warm-up and cool-down	Aim for consistency
Thurs	Easy 25 mins jog	
Fri	50 mins steady pace	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	90 mins	Long, slow run

Week No.3		
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	30 mins easy	
Tues	50 mins hilly circuit with efforts on hills	
Wed	Rest	
Thurs	60 mins steady	
Fri	35 mins steady	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	100-110 mins taken very easy	

Week No.4	Moving up	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	35 mins steady	
Wed	3 x 8-10 mins hard, 3 mins recovery between efforts, with warm-up and cool-down	Repeat of week 2 session but with more confidence
Thurs	35 min jog	
Fri	50 mins steady	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	50 mins fast paced run with warm-up and cool-down	Treat as a race

Week No.5		
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	25 mins recovery jog	
Tues	Steady 45 mins	
Wed	60 mins off-road and hilly fartlek session	Keep the pace very easy but try and jog non-stop.
Thurs	Rest	Aim for a faster pace. 4 x 100m strides after run.
Fri	Easy 45 mins	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	120 mins slow	First 2 hour run, take it easy

Week No.6		
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	24 mins jog	
Tues	45 mins steady	
Wed	Warm-up, then alternate 3 minute hard bursts with 3 minutes of easy jogging, cool-down	
Thurs	Rest	
Fri	60 mins comfortable pace	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	120-130 mins slow	Don't push; easy back if you feel tired

Week No.7		
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	25 mins very easy	
Tues	45 mins steady	
Wed	60 mins fartlek with long duration efforts	
Thurs	Rest	
Fri	50 mins steady	
Sat	25 mins easy jog	
Sun	90 mins good pace with long warm-up and cool-down	

Week No.8	Mini taper and half marathon race	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	45 mins steady	
Wed	Rest	
Thurs	45 mins steady	
Fri	Rest	
Sat	20 mins very slow jog	Really, really slow
Sun	Half marathon race + warm-up and cool-down	Good effort

Week No.9	Build up again	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	45 mins easy pace	
Wed	4 x 8-10 mins hard, 2½ minutes recovery between efforts, with warm-up and cool-down	
Thurs	45 mins easy	
Fri	70 mins at race pace	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	145 mins	Long, slow run

Week No.10		
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	25 mins jog recovery	
Tues	45 mins steady	
Wed	Rest	
Thurs	75 mins off-road fartlek	
Fri	45 mins easy	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	160 mins taken easy	Slow start and take drinks

Week No.11	Build up again	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	50 mins steady	
Wed	2 x 15 mins hard, 4 minutes recovery between efforts, with warm-up and cool-down	
Thurs	45 mins steady	
Fri	25 mins easy jog	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	180 mins slow, take drinks en route	

Week No.12	Mini taper and 10k race	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	45 mins steady	
Wed	50 mins relaxed fartlek	
Thurs	45 mins steady	
Fri	Rest	
Sat	20 mins easy jog	
Sun	10k race + good warm-up and cool-down	Hard Effort

Week No.13	Peak week
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Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	25 mins easy recovery	
Tues	45 mins steady	
Wed	4 x 15 mins hard, 2½ minutes recovery between efforts, with warm-up and cool-down	Try to improve on previous distances
Thurs	35 mins slow	
Fri	50 mins steady	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	200 mins slow	Last long run, be economical

Week No.14	Start of race taper	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	50 mins steady	
Wed	60 mins easy fartlek	
Thurs	35 mins jog	
Fri	45 mins at marathon race pace	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	130 mins steady	

Week No.15	Further tapering	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	5 mins easy off-road	
Tues	Easy 25 min jog or rest	Rest if tired
Wed	35 mins brisk pace + warm-up and cool-down	
Thurs	45 mins steady	
Fri	Rest	
Sat	25 mins easy	
Sun	50 mins steady	Slower than intended race pace

Week No.16	Final taper and preparation week	
Day	Training	Training notes

Mon	Rest	
Tues	Warm-up, 10 mins at race pace, cool-down	
Wed	30 mins very easy	
Thurs	Rest or 25 mins easy	
Fri	Rest	
Sat	15 mins very, very easy jog	
Sun	Race day!	THE RACE!

Conclusion

Well done!

You have come to the end of the 16-week plan, and your fitness has advanced dramatically. Along the way, you have made significant health and fitness gains, and equally importantly, you have progressed safely.

By maintaining your training, you will be making a major contribution to your long-term health and fitness and this intermediate plan can also serve as a foundation and springboard to increase your fitness levels further. Statistics show that most runners can continue to improve and progress for at least seven years after they first take up the sport. Now you've advanced and improved, you may be tempted to step up further and try to knock more minutes off your finishing time.

See the realbuzz guide: 'Advanced Marathon Training Plan' for a comprehensive training program that will help you progress to the next level.



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