

Half Marathon Training - From First Timers to Faster Times

“Half Marathon”... To the uninitiated, the tone of this title hints at a runner on the way to something bigger and better. And you might be, but the half marathon is also a brilliant goal all its own. It’s long enough to be challenging, but doesn’t take months to train for or recover from. A beginner can build to a half marathon in four to six months; a regular lunchtime runner could step up to the 21.1k challenge in two or three months; and anyone who regularly runs one hour could get ready in four to six weeks. In short, taking on a half marathon fits into any lifestyle and any level of fitness. Whether a first timer, second timer or 10-timer - this is for you.

If you’ve been running for a while - say 45min, three times a week for two or three months - you could be as little as eight weeks away from completing your first half marathon. If you’re more of a beginner, though, it’s better to work through a series of goals.

Getting Started

Beginners, occasional runners, and walkers looking to move on the running, should start out training to run your first 5k and then 10k before tackling the half marathon. This stepping stone approach gives you shorter term goals to focus on while gradually building fitness without risking injury from doing too much too soon.

Before you head out the door though, we need to think about the type of running you need to do to not only complete a half marathon, but also complete it well.

Endurance

It doesn’t take a university degree to realise that the key to completing a half marathon is endurance. The ability to last the distance, regardless of speed, is everything. Endurance for runners involves two basic elements:

- 1) *Aerobic endurance* - the ability for the heart to pump large volumes of blood to supply the working muscles with oxygen.
- 2) *Muscular endurance* - the ability for the legs to hold up to the pounding of running.

The best way to achieve both these things is lots of regular running on a consistent basis.

Shorter runs more often is always better than longer running less often. Recreational runners, for example, will benefit more by running every second day than running five days in a row and then being forced to take three days off. Likewise, competitive runners would benefit more from spreading seven hours of running over six or seven days than dividing it over four or five bigger days.

As well as consistency, the type of running you do has a big bearing on building endurance. To be able to stay consistent you can’t do this regular running too fast for the simple reason that if you do, you’ll tire too quickly and be forced to stop or take breaks, which means you won’t be building endurance.

When you run at efforts above 85 percent of maximum heart rate you are training anaerobic endurance more than aerobic endurance. There is a place for anaerobic training for more advanced runners wanting to improve their times. But it is added to your training only after aerobic training is in place because without aerobic endurance you won’t last 21.1k, let alone do it faster.

This consistent aerobic endurance training needs to be at an effort of between 60 to 75 percent of maximum heart rate (depending on fitness background). This is an effort where you could still hold some sort of conversation while running. Another trick to building endurance is to vary the distance you run. Instead of running the same distance every

run, try running longer in one run & shorter in the next run. So instead of running, say, 45 minutes every run, you’ll get faster improvements by alternating runs of 60 minutes and 30 minutes.

This is the process of adaptation, where the longer runs continually push the boundaries of your endurance while the shorter run allows you to recover for another longer run while maintaining fitness. Eventually, some of your longer runs (once every week for most people) need to gradually increase to somewhere close to 21k or two hours.

Speed

Most people end up completing their first half marathon at around their normal training pace. But if you are comfortably running 90min to two hours, then you might like to explore your potential a little. If so, then you’ll need to do some faster and higher intensity running. For runners wanting to improve performance, the need for speed is three-fold:

- 1) To build biomechanical efficiency at speed.
- 2) To build a higher level of oxygen uptake.
- 3) To develop the endurance to hold higher speeds/efforts for longer.

The need to build higher oxygen uptake is obvious. Half marathons are an essentially aerobic affair (body can meet its energy requirements via oxygen uptake). If you can improve oxygen uptake, you will be able to run faster for longer. What we’re talking about

here is increasing your bodies maximum ability to absorb and utilise oxygen. We do this by doing some of our running at a faster but still aerobic effort. This is called anaerobic threshold (AT) training, where we are gradually extending how far we can go and/or how fast we can go before aerobic effort becomes anaerobic effort.

Physiologically, anaerobic threshold is an effort (heart rate) between 10k pace and half marathon pace. So, AT training can vary from 30-45min runs at half marathon pace to interval sessions such as six repeats of 1.5k at 10k pace with 2-5min easy jogging between each rep. For anyone wanting to improve their half marathon times a weekly workout like this is very specific because it also trains pace judgement.

Impact Can Be Good

To maximize the specificity of your training you need to do a certain amount of running on the actual surface the race will be held on - i.e: the road. Road running gets a bad rap as the fast way to injury. But well-planned regular road sessions will condition your body to handle the impact of road running. For longer races this is crucial because impact is the main factor in muscle fatigue.

To condition your body to impact, alternate runs between road and off-road. Once you're happy running an hour on the road you can bring in the long runs on the road to.

Rest Is Even Better

Most people think that long distance running is all about mileage. It's not! The key is actually rest! And get this: while you need to do some running, you actually get stronger when you're not running!

The reasoning here relates to the very essence of the human body. We're extremely adaptive organisms that can adapt to handle almost any stress. If you catch a cold you get ill, the body eventually builds immunity. Likewise, if you regularly partake in reasonable amounts of running (a stress) the body will become better at handling it... BUT... the body doesn't adapt while you're stressing it. It adapts only when you allow it to rest.

Formula: *Stress + Rest = Adaptation.*

In the case of sport, adaptation means improvement. And not merely in your immediate performance, but also your ability to handle more stress. So, in the long term you'll find yourself able to handle more training, which means you force more adaptation, which means you continue getting faster and stronger. The key is working out how much stress you can handle before you need to rest.

To train for the half marathon you need to stress the body with longer relaxed runs, then allow it to recover with shorter easier runs or even a day off. A good training program will force adaptation to other essential running elements by alternating hillier runs with flatter runs, faster runs with slower runs, road runs with off-road runs.

Once the training is in place you also need to think about recovering for the big race. In the last week or two you need to let your body recover from the training so the adaptation is complete by race day. This means gradually reducing the amount of running you are doing, but maintaining the frequency of runs so that you maintain fitness.

You can also extend this recovery principle into your lifestyle by scheduling your easiest runs or

days off to coincide with high stress days at work or home, like Mondays and Fridays. Likewise, after achieving your half marathon goal you should allow several days, a week or two even, of rest and easier runs to allow the body to recover from what for most people will be their hardest run to date.

Training Schedules

The half marathon is a wonderfully achievable challenge that is both a useful stepping-stone to the marathon or a worthy challenge in itself. And once you can handle a half marathon, you're on your way to improving your running across all distances.

The following schedules are good starting points from which to tailor your own half marathon training.

The beginner's schedule is for a first-time half marathoner who has already been running for perhaps 12 weeks and built up to 10k (see 10k training program on website). This means an absolute beginner needs approx. six months for their goal of completing a half marathon.

The intermediate schedule is for runners who have completed one or two half marathons and want to go a bit faster. Or maybe you just want get a bit fitter to enjoy your running more. It is intended as a logical step up from having completed the beginners schedule at least once.

The advanced schedule is intended as a step up for a runner with a couple of years and several half marathons behind them, who is now keen to explore their potential over the 21k distance... Hopefully that'll be all of you eventually !

Half Marathon - Beginners Schedule

4 U	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12
MON	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off
TUES	40min <i>easy, flat</i>	50min <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	30min <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	70min <i>steady, flat</i>	80min <i>steady, flat</i>	45min <i>easy, flat</i>	80min <i>easy, hilly</i>	1.5hrs <i>inc 30min goal pace</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	45min <i>easy</i>
WED	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off
THUR	40min <i>easy, flat</i>	50min <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>easy, hilly</i>	30min <i>easy, hilly</i>	1hr <i>easy, hilly</i>	70min <i>easy, hilly</i>	80min <i>easy, hilly</i>	45min <i>easy, hilly</i>	80min <i>inc 30min goal pace</i>	1.5hrs <i>easy, hilly</i>	1.5hrs <i>easy, flat</i>	30min <i>easy</i>
FRI	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off
SAT	30min <i>easy, flat</i>	35min <i>easy, flat</i>	40min <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>Easy, flat</i>	40min <i>easy, flat</i>	50min <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>very easy</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	30min <i>goal pace</i>	15min <i>easy</i>
SUN	10k <i>easy, flat</i>	12k <i>easy, flat</i>	14k <i>easy, flat</i>	30min <i>easy, flat</i>	14k <i>easy, flat</i>	16k <i>easy, flat</i>	18k <i>easy, flat</i>	30min <i>goal pace</i>	18k <i>easy, flat</i>	20k <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	YOUR 21.1k GOAL
Hints	<i>Establishing consistency. Introducing longer runs.</i>			Recovery Week	<i>Gradually increasing volume. Introducing strength work.</i>			Recovery Week	<i>Peak volume & strength. Introducing race pace.</i>		<i>Gradually tapering volume to freshen for race.</i>	
	Easy = comfortable effort (<70% maxHR) / Steady = firm but manageable effort (70-75% maxHR) / Goal Pace = pace per kilometre for your Half Marathon goal time. Flat = flat or rolling terrain / Hilly = terrain with several uphill of 2-10min / Legspeed = 30sec stride outs on flat terrain at speed you could hold for 5min (1500m pace). Days Off - recovery days to absorb the training, but could also be used for "easy" non-impact training such as swimming, gym, palates, cycling etc.											

Half Marathon - Intermediate Schedule

4 U	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12
MON	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off
TUES	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>steady, flat</i>	40min <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>easy, hilly</i>	75min <i>steady, flat</i>	1.5hrs 30 <i>easy</i> 30 <i>steady</i> 30 <i>goal pace</i>	45min <i>easy, flat</i>	1.5hrs 30 <i>easy</i> 30 <i>steady</i> 30 <i>goal pace</i>	1.5hrs 30 <i>easy</i> 30 <i>steady</i> 30 <i>goal pace</i>	1hr <i>inc 30min</i> <i>goal pace</i>	50min <i>easy, flat</i>
WED	30min <i>easy, flat</i>	35min <i>easy, flat</i>	40min <i>easy, flat</i>	Day Off	40min <i>easy, flat</i>	45min <i>easy, flat</i>	40min <i>easy, flat</i>	Day Off	45min <i>easy, flat</i>	45min <i>easy, flat</i>	40min <i>easy, flat</i>	40min <i>inc 20min</i> <i>goal pace</i>
THUR	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	70min <i>easy, flat</i>	80min <i>easy, hilly</i>	40min <i>easy, hilly</i>	80min <i>steady, flat</i>	1.5hrs <i>steady, hilly</i>	1.5hrs <i>steady, hilly</i>	45min <i>inc 30min</i> <i>goal pace</i>	1.5hrs <i>steady, flat</i>	1.5hrs <i>steady, hilly</i>	1.5hrs <i>easy, flat</i>	30min <i>easy</i>
FRI	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off
SAT	30min <i>easy, flat</i>	35min <i>easy, flat</i>	40min <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	40min <i>inc legspeed</i> x6	45min <i>inc legspeed</i> x8	45min <i>inc legspeed</i> x10	1hr <i>easy, hilly</i>	45min <i>inc legspeed</i> x10	45min <i>inc legspeed</i> x10	45min <i>inc legspeed</i> x10	15min <i>easy</i>
SUN	14k <i>easy, flat</i>	16k <i>easy, flat</i>	18k <i>easy, flat</i>	30min <i>goal pace</i>	18k <i>easy, flat</i>	20k <i>easy, flat</i>	20k <i>easy, flat</i>	30min <i>easy, flat</i>	20k <i>easy, flat</i>	20k <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	YOUR 21.1k GOAL
Hints	<i>Establish consistency. Introduce longer runs.</i>			<i>Recovery Week</i>	<i>Gradually increasing volume. Introducing strength work.</i>			<i>Recovery Week</i>	<i>Peak volume & strength. Introducing race pace.</i>		<i>Gradually tapering volume to freshen for race</i>	
	Easy = comfortable effort (<70% maxHR) / Steady = firm but manageable effort (70-75% maxHR) / Goal Pace = pace per kilometre for your Half Marathon goal time. Flat = flat or rolling terrain / Hilly = terrain with several uphill of 2-10min / Legspeed = 30sec stride outs on flat terrain at speed you could hold for 5min (1500m pace). Days Off - recovery days to absorb the training, but could also be used for "easy" non-impact training such as swimming, gym, palates, cycling etc.											

Half Marathon - Advanced Schedule

4 U	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12
MON	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off	Day Off
TUES	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	75min <i>steady, hilly</i>	1.5hrs <i>steady, hilly</i>	45min <i>easy, flat</i>	1.5hrs <i>easy, flat</i>	1.5hrs <i>inc 4x 1.5k 10k pace 2-3min rec</i>	1.5hrs <i>inc 6x 1.5k 10k pace 2-3min rec</i>	45min <i>easy, flat</i>	1.5hrs <i>inc 6x 1.5k 10k pace 2-3min rec</i>	1.5hrs <i>inc 6x 1.5k 10k pace 2-3min rec</i>	1hr <i>inc 30min goal pace</i>	1hr <i>20 easy 20 steady 20 goal pace</i>
WED	40min <i>easy, flat</i>	50min <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>inc legspeed x10</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>inc legspeed x10</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	1.5hrs <i>easy, flat</i>	45min <i>easy, flat</i>
THUR	1hr <i>easy, hilly</i>	75min <i>easy, hilly</i>	1.5hrs <i>steady, hilly</i>	Day Off	1.5hrs <i>steady, hilly</i>	1.5hrs <i>steady, hilly</i>	1.5hrs <i>30 easy 30 steady 30 goal pace</i>	Day Off	1.5hrs <i>30 easy 30 steady 30 goal pace</i>	1.5hrs <i>30 easy 30 steady 30 goal pace</i>	1hr <i>inc legspeed x10</i>	30min <i>inc leg speed x5</i>
FRI	30min <i>inc legspeed x4</i>	45min <i>inc legspeed x6</i>	1hr <i>inc legspeed x8</i>	15min <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>inc legspeed x10</i>	1hr <i>inc legspeed x10</i>	1hr <i>inc legspeed x10</i>	15min <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>inc legspeed x10</i>	1hr <i>inc legspeed x10</i>	15min <i>easy, flat</i>	Day Off
SAT	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	1hr <i>steady, flat</i>	1hr <i>inc 30min goal pace</i>	10k Race	1hr <i>inc 30min goal pace</i>	1hr <i>inc 30min goal pace</i>	1hr <i>inc 5x 1k 5k pace 3-4min rec</i>	10k Race	1hr <i>inc 5x 1k 5k pace 3-4min rec</i>	1hr <i>inc 5x 1k 5k pace 3-4min rec</i>	5k Race	15min <i>easy</i>
SUN	1.5hrs <i>easy, hilly</i>	1.75hrs <i>easy, flat</i>	2hrs <i>easy, hilly</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	2hrs <i>steady, flat</i>	2hrs <i>steady, flat</i>	2hrs <i>steady, hilly</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	2hrs <i>steady, flat</i>	20k <i>steady, flat</i>	1hr <i>easy, flat</i>	YOUR 21.1k GOAL
Hints	<i>Establish consistency. Introduce longer runs.</i>			<i>Recovery Week</i>	<i>Gradually increasing volume. Introducing strength work.</i>			<i>Recovery Week</i>	<i>Peak volume & strength. Introducing race pace.</i>		<i>Gradually tapering volume to freshen for race</i>	
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