Training for a marathon [1]

Dear Alice,

I'll soon begin training for the NYC Marathon in November. What type of weight training exercises and schedules are recommended for long distance runners?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Congratulations on deciding to run the big 26.2! Marathon training programs usually begin six months before the event. Most schedules for first time marathoners outline weekly mileage, daily totals, and rest days. Some tips include:

- Begin by building your weekly mileage gradually to establish a running base before you begin your training program.
- Increase the number of weekly miles slowly, ranging from 1 to 3 miles per week.
- Reserve one day a week for long runs. Many schedules begin with 6 to 12 miles and peak at 20 to 23 miles.
- Make sure to include enough rest days in your training program. Rest will help your body recover after long runs.
- Taper off and decrease mileage during the last two weeks before the marathon.

Some schedules also include recommendations for weight training and cross-training activities. Including activities like biking, swimming, or walking might help build overall fitness, while providing a necessary break from running. However, the important thing is to pick a schedule that fits your current level of fitness, the number of days and amount of time you want to spend training, and your goals for the marathon. Following an established schedule adequately prepares people physically and emotionally for the big day; however, over? or under?training can lead to injury.

Focusing on a total body workout has benefits, especially when it comes to developing a strong, well?conditioned body. Many runners neglect their muscles from the waist up, so weight training is advised, as you are aware. Since upper body strength contributes to improved performance, you can picture your arms as your steering mechanism. What's more, strong, vigorous arm motion may contribute to a powerful finish. Trunk muscles provide coordination and balance while core strength can help maintain posture and form when fatigued during long runs. A variety of lower body exercises for the quadriceps, hamstrings, calves, and gluteus muscles helps strengthen muscles, tendons, and other connective tissue
that also may help prevent injury. Proper hydration, stretching, and icing are important actions to take as well.

A running club can offer advice and support, as well as running partners. Often, they provide motivation for the big event, group training runs, and possibly lectures. Many communities have such groups through the local Y, community centers, and/or stores that sell running gear. A running coach or running classes can provide feedback regarding form and other valuable tips. Many charities also provide coaching and group training programs in exchange for raising money for a worthwhile cause. There are also a number of online resources and books with information on marathon training, including:

- The New York Road Runners [2]
- The New York City Marathon Training [3]
- Training Programs by Hal Higdon [4], author of Marathon: The Ultimate Training Guide
- Runner's World [5]

For many people, the excitement of the marathon is in being in the race as well as completing the marathon. A marathon also has a component involving mind over matter. If you are new to marathons, you may want to avoid focusing on your time. Instead, focus on fulfilling your own particular goal(s), such as the goal of finishing the marathon, even if you make the decision to walk?run. Remember, you're not competing with anyone but yourself.

Good luck,

Alice!

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