

## Guidelines for novice marathon runners

### Choose your race

When deciding on your first marathon to run, the first step is choosing your race carefully. Having a definite goal helps with motivation and consistency. Saying, I'm going to run a marathon by the end of the year will probably mean you won't make it to the starting line. Make sure you have enough time for training and getting to know the route will help to make a great first marathon experience.

1. You should be able to run 10kms comfortably before starting your marathon training.
2. Choose a marathon at least 16 weeks away. This will make sure you have enough time to get in the right training.
3. Check out [www.runnersguide.co.za](http://www.runnersguide.co.za) for your marathon's course rating and profile. The runs will be rated on a 1-4 scale. Stick to the level 1 to 3 races and leave the level 4's for when you're more experienced. The profile gives you change in height over distance, effectively showing you where and how tough the hills are.
4. Choose a marathon that is well known and well organised. Talk to fellow runners about the marathons they've run and what they recommend. There are also a lot of running forums available to post questions about races. For example: the Soweto marathon is a great race but is known for running out of water towards the end. Not a great experience for your first marathon!
5. Support can help get you to the end. Find out from the race organisers how easy it is for your family or friends to second you along the way.

### Training programme

There are a vast amount of training programmes available to the novice runner. There are a few elements that each training programme should have.

1. **Base training**- this is the first stage of the programme and is where you build your aerobic endurance. Remember, your aerobic system will improve before your musculoskeletal system (joints, ligaments, tendons) so it's important to progress total weekly mileage by no more than 10% per week to allow your body to adapt properly to the increased training. Generally this stage is made up of longer, slower runs.
2. **Quality training**- during this stage of the programme you can start adding some quality training. There are many types of quality training e.g. interval training, hill training, track running. For novice runners I recommend hill training over any speed work as you need strength to get you through rather than speed. Remember you're training for a marathon so you don't need to do short sprints but longer runs at sub-maximal effort e.g. 1km repeats at 80% effort.
3. **Rest**- is an essential part of any training programme. You get fit by stressing your body during a training session and then recovering. During rest your body recovers stronger than it was before. If you don't make sure to have the rest days, your body will not be able to recover and will actually become weaker.
4. **Long Run**- your maximum single running distance in training should be 30-32 km. The long run helps to prepare you mentally for the full distance and is an important marker in your training. Don't do your long run in the last 3 weeks of your training programme.

5. **Tapering**- this is a very important stage of the programme. The aim of tapering is to make sure you are rested and ready for your race but have not lost any fitness in the process. Keep up with your quality sessions until the week before. In the final two weeks, reduce your mileage, keep runs easy and comfortable and make sure you have a total rest day the day before the race. For myself, I like to have 3 days total rest before the race to prepare myself mentally while others get antsy and prefer to do some short easy runs. You will need to test what's best for you.

### Race preparation

Being prepared for your race and knowing your strategy helps with the nerves.

There's a golden rule among runners. "Don't try anything new on race day". This applies to everything you may need on race day. Make sure you've tested them on a long run and know they're comfortable.

1. **Kit**- Socks, Shoes, Underwear, Shorts, Shirt, Hat. Do they chafe? Are they comfortable? Do you get blisters?
2. **Nutrition**- Will you use Gu's? What brand? What flavour do you prefer? When will you take them? Will you drink coke and water? How much? When? Will you eat bananas or potatoes on the run?
3. **Race day**- What will you have for breakfast on race day? Which sunscreen will you wear? Will you need Vaseline for chaffing? Will you leave your tog bag at the bag drop? How will you get to the start? Will you start with a warm top and gloves? Where do you like to stand at the start?
4. **The run**- What is your target time? How fast per km do you need to run? What time do you expect to get to 10km, half way etc.

### During the race

You've done all the hard work and now it's time to enjoy. You have a long way to go so begin slowly, chat to people and enjoy the vibe. Your aim is to run the race consistently. You don't want to start off too fast and bomb at 10km to go. The slower you start in the beginning the more likely you'll be able to run through consistently. I like to give myself little rewards to help keep me focused and motivated along the way e.g. I'm going to stop and walk at every 2<sup>nd</sup> water station.

If you start to get sore, remember, you'll never get more sore than sore (unless you have an injury). Don't take any pain killers on the road. They can cause a lot of problems with your stomach as you won't have eaten and kidneys as they'll be already working very hard clearing extra wastes.

### After the race

Well done! You've made it! You've achieved what you set out to do. Enjoy the feeling, there's nothing like it 😊

If you're starting to feel sore, first have something to eat before taking pain killers. Some doctors say you shouldn't take them at this stage as it interferes with your natural healing cycle but see what works for you and how you're feeling. I usually wait to see how I feel the next day before taking anything.

*\*Written by Jeanne Matthis Biokineticist*

Jeanne Matthis Biokineticist  
HPCSA No: BK 0009822  
Pr No: 0296252

Tel: 011 267 1416  
jeanne@fourwaysbio.co.za  
www.fourwaysbiokinetics.co.za