

HALF MARATHON TRAINING FOR BEGINNERS

This is for beginners and those who have been over the distance once before, in around two hours, and would now like to try for something a little faster. The schedules assume that you have already got into the running habit and are doing two or three miles at a time, about three times a week.

The important thing in this programme is to build up your endurance. The pattern is to keep most of the runs to 20 or 30 minutes, which can easily be fitted into the day, but to do one long run a week. This run gradually increases in distance over the weeks.

The training volume levels out at about 22 miles a week, spread over four runs. On two of those days you should be running easily, recovering from the harder sessions. Don't make the mistake of thinking that more training is automatically better for you; unless your body is given a long time to adjust, putting in too much training is more likely to lead to overtiredness and injury.

I recommend that you enter some races after a few weeks, especially if you haven't raced before. Run in a 10K as if you were doing the first half of a half-marathon, without putting pressure on yourself.

By the later stages of the schedule, you should know how your body is coping with the training load. If 22 miles a week is hard work, try cutting down Week 9 to 15 miles, but otherwise you can continue at the regular volume until the last week.

In the final week we start tapering; by reducing the amount of running, you will be building up extra energy stores in your leg muscles, so that you should really feel like racing by the time the big day comes.

In this schedule, you can arrange the days as you like, though try to have a rest after a hard day. A typical pattern would be Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday, with the longest run on the Sunday.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
WEEK 1	4M slow	3M slow	4M	3M, timed
WEEK 2	3M easy	3M, with a few 50m bursts	3M easy	5-6M slow
WEEK 3	4M easy	4M, with a few 100m bursts	3M, timed, plus 1M jog	7-8M slow (or 1 hour)
WEEK 4	4M easy	4M, inc several 30-sec bursts	4M	8M slow (or 1 hr)
WEEK 5	4M or 35 mins easy, off-road if possible	4-5M of fast-and-slow, with bursts up the hills (but not down them)	4M or 35 mins easy, off-road if possible	9-10M steady, or 10K race
WEEK 6	3-4M easy on soft ground	1M jog, then 2 x 5 mins fast, with 5-min slow jog recovery	4M easy on grass	9-10M slow
WEEK 7	3-4M easy, off-road if possible	3M, inc a few short bursts	3M on grass	Warm up, then 10K race, then 10 mins walking or jogging
WEEK 8	4-5M easy, off-road	1M jog, then 2 x 7-8 mins fast, with 5-min jog recovery	4M on grass, inc several short bursts	11-12M, as slow as you like
WEEK 9	3-4M easy, on soft ground	1M jog, then 2 x 5 mins fast, with 5-min slow jog recovery between	4M easy on grass	9-10M slow
WEEK 10	3M easy, off-road	1M jog, then 1M at race speed, then 1M jog	2M jog	Race day

Half-Marathon Race Preparation

Although nothing like as taxing as a full marathon, the 21K distance does need to be treated with respect, particularly if the weather is hot. You should finish your breakfast three hours before the start, but there is nothing wrong with drinking tea, coffee, water or squash up to an hour before the start, and if it is really hot, I suggest drinking half a pint of water five minutes before the start. Don't drink half an hour before the start, or you'll be bursting for a pee while waiting for the gun!

If you're aiming to run fast, you should go through a gentle warm-up routine during the 20 minutes leading up to the start – jogging, stretching and striding. If you're doing an event with a large field, you'll probably find yourself running very fast in the first mile, so try to keep warm and loose during the final few minutes when you are wedged in the crowd.