

# 5 Tips to Ramp Up Your Long Runs

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With the marathon season about to kick into high gear, this is the time that you and many runners ramp up your long runs in preparation. The long run is one of the most important pieces of the marathon training puzzle. But it's also one of the most difficult, especially for newer runners. Here are some of the keys to getting the most out of your long runs this season.

## 1. Start slowly.

No matter how good you feel at the beginning of the run, it's best to start your long runs at a very comfortable pace. It's OK to speed up a little as you go along, and even push the pace in the final miles if you're feeling good--as long as you start slowly. There's nothing more discouraging than struggling through the final miles of a run because you started off too fast. The more slowly I run the first few miles of a long run, the faster I'm able to finish and the faster I'm able to recover after the run.

## 2. Hydrate regularly.

Dehydration can be a real concern on long runs. It's best to get some fluids into your system at least every 30 minutes during the run. Stash some water or sports drink bottles along the route or run multiple loops of a course with fluids available at the start of each loop.

If you're running from your house, you could even set up a homemade aid station on your lawn, and let your kids or spouse hand you paper cups with water or sports drink as you run by. This gives you a chance to practice drinking on the run, and gets the whole family involved. With a little practice gripping and squeezing the paper cup, you will be able to drink while running. If you get this technique down, it can help shave off a minute or two during the marathon. You won't have to stop and drink at each station.

## 3. Don't get too far from home.

I find it's best to run several loops of a course that's about 5 miles long. That way, if I'm really struggling, the weather changes or I begin to feel an injury coming on, I'm never more than about 2 ½ miles from home. This is especially important when you're running in very warm or very cold weather conditions. It's also a good idea to run with a training partner or group. Running buddies can help keep you motivated and make the miles go by more quickly.

## 4. Build your distance gradually.

It takes several long runs for your body to become fully acclimatized to the distance. As you begin to prepare for a marathon, start with a long run that's only a couple of miles longer than the longest run you've done recently. Add a mile or two each week until you reach the maximum distance. That way, you're not overwhelming your body with what you're suddenly asking it to do, and you're also less likely to get injured.

A common question is: What is the maximum distance I need to run in training to adequately prepare for a marathon? There is no one right answer for everyone. There's a bit of a trade-off. Doing too long of a long run contributes greatly to your overall fatigue, and puts you at a greater risk of injury. On the other hand, not running far enough can leave you unprepared for the final miles of the race.

I find that about doing three to four runs of 18 to 20 miles or 30 to 32K during my training build up is enough to keep me from struggling in the final miles of the race without beating me up too badly.

## 5. Pay attention to recovery.

Recovery after a long run is extremely important to allow your body to refuel, rebuild broken down muscle and connective tissue, and adapt to the physical stress. There are a couple of key ways that you can help your body to recover after a long run:

- **Nutritional recovery:** Long runs deplete the glycogen in your muscles and liver which is a key source of energy for running. Studies have shown that eating a meal with 4 grams of carbohydrates for every gram of protein best allows your muscles to restock your glycogen stores. Your muscles also refuel best soon after intense exercise, so eating within the first 30 minutes to 2 hours of finishing your run is best for a quicker recovery.
- **Physical recovery:** I find that 5 to 10 minutes of gently stretching my hamstrings, quads and calves feels good and reduces the muscle stiffness and soreness that comes from doing a long run. Get off your feet for a while if you can, and avoid scheduling any physically demanding tasks for the rest of the day. Sleep is also a huge factor in your physical recovery, and the night's sleep after the long run is most important to give your body a chance to rebuild damaged tissue.

Long runs are certainly one of the most challenging aspects of marathon training, but they're also one of the most rewarding. There's nothing quite like the feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction after you finish a long run. That feeling is a big part of why we run marathons in the first place.

*Jacquie Cattanach is an avid runner and triathlete whose biggest achievements have been completing 15 marathons and Ironman Canada. She has learned and experienced a lot of trials and tribulations along the way and writes about them on her [Online Running Gear Blog](#), where she also researches and reviews running products such as the [P90X](#) and the [jeep overland jogging stroller](#).*