

5 Starting Steps for a First-Time Marathoner

By [Patrick McCrann](#) • For [Active.com](#)

If this is your year to complete a [marathon](#), then now is the time to take action. Registering is the easy part; it's the weeks and months of training that transform your body and fitness in preparation for the test of 26.2 miles.

Countless first time runners slog through months of hard work only to miss their marathon goal. It could be [overtraining](#). It could be an injury. It could be waiting too long to get started. Whatever the cause, here are five key marathon tips that will make sure you arrive at the start line ready to have the run of your life.

Pick and Stick a Training Plan

While [training for a marathon](#) isn't rocket science, there has to be a method to the madness. From building up your mileage to inserting recovery periods, from identifying your longest run to managing the taper, there are quite a few bigger picture items that you'll need to manage.

What Kind of Runner Are You?

Are you a neutral or motion control runner? Do you like minimalist or trail running shoes? Are you cross training or preparing for a tri? No matter your type, we've got the shoe for you. Unsure of what your feet need?

As a beginner marathoner, most of this stuff isn't even on your radar...until it's too late. Many newbies are worried about picking the right shoes or trying to fit a workout into each day. Or they waste training time by just piggybacking on whatever their running buddies are doing that day. Finding and sticking with a quality training plan will improve your fitness and give you confidence to complete the marathon.

Get Fit For a Pair of Shoes

The absolute worst thing you can do as a newbie runner is to shop for your shoes online. Reach out to your local running network and find a good local running store; ideally a mom-and-pop operation. Have the salesperson watch you walk in bare feet and make some shoe suggestions. Take the shoes outside for a brief test drive (so wear active clothing and wash those stinky socks first!) and hopefully the salesperson can watch you there as well.

A great deal more goes into picking the right shoe outside of whether or not your foot will actually fit inside of it. There are foot width considerations, the dynamic motion of your foot as it lands (pronates/supinates/etc) as well as your natural gait and stride length. Having someone walk you through this process will go a long way toward identifying the proper shoe for you. It might not be perfect, but it will most certainly be better than what you find online by yourself.

Pick a Rest Day (or Two)!

Running is both fun and empowering. Yet few will acknowledge that it has a darker side...addiction! It's easy to fall in love with running; you look and feel better and early improvements are fast and furious. But too much of even a good thing can set you back.

Avoid falling into a daily running routine across all seven days, at least until you have been consistently running for three months. This will allow you to develop a better understanding of your personal running limits.

Until that time, however, rest is just as important as any single workout session. As a beginner you should consider two rest days, with at least one falling on the day after your longest run of the week. As you gain fitness and confidence, you can move to just one rest day a week (still after your longest run).

But keep that rest day option throughout your marathon cycle. It's not about who's logged the most miles, but rather who is the most prepared to run 26.2 miles that does the best—and rest is a critical component of this success factor.

Track Minutes Not Miles

One of the best ways to challenge yourself is to track your progress. You can see how many workouts you've done in a year, or how many times you've run around the town lake. But the one thing you want to do is be careful about tracking how many miles you've run.

You can keep a log so you know how much you've run; such a log is a great tool for knowing when it's a good idea to change out your shoes (usually every 300 to 500 miles). But don't track miles as a daily benchmark to try and surpass regularly. This can lead to overtraining your miles in an endless game of one-upsmanship.

Think about it—while you initially felt good about your 25 miles run last week, you suddenly found out that Jimmy ran 30 miles...so now you feel like a chump. But it's quite possible that Jimmy's a faster runner, putting in his 35 miles in less time it took you to do 25....trying to keep up with Jimmy will mean logging even more training time and increasing your odds of fatigue or injury.

Instead, track how many minutes you run. Add them up by week and month, and eventually year. You'll be able to see how you progress and you'll avoid getting competitive to the point of a setback.

Stretch Five Minutes Every Day You Run

Running is great...until it's suddenly not. Something's wrong with your foot or your hip and the best short-term solution is to stop running just when you had gotten on a roll.

It's a bummer, but you aren't alone. Thousands of runners each year are forced into some type of downtime because they didn't take care of their bodies. While you can't always [injury-proof](#) yourself, you can make sure that you are staying aware of how your body is handling the stress of training and remain on the right track.

Take five minutes each night to stretch as you relax or watch TV. You can do the same stretches or get creative with different routines for each night. Regardless of which one you choose, make sure to include something for your hips, calves and hamstrings in each session. Five minutes a day might not seem like much, but it's over half an hour each week...and that adds up across a year.

[Patrick McCrann](#) is an Active.com Expert and the head coach at Marathon Nation, home of the Smarter, Faster Runner. If you liked this article, you'll enjoy [Your Best Marathon](#), a book about crafting your ideal race. You can find more resources on the Marathon Nation [website](#), including Patrick's [pace-based training plans](#) for marathons, half marathons and speed work. Subscribe to Patrick's [newsletter](#) for weekly running updates.