

Race Recovery

Even if you've run twice as far as you've ever raced before in your life, you can be back to your normal running routine very quickly by following a few simple steps, before and after your race. By mentally and physically preparing for the morning after, you can reduce the negatives, while emotionally riding the wave of positive momentum from even the toughest of races.

At the finish line: Even if you don't want to, keep walking after you cross the finish. Grab two cups of water, drink and keep walking. Get two more cups and pour them on your legs and two more on your head if you feel hot. Walk to the food area, pick up your carbohydrate snacks of choice, and eat, while you continue drinking water or electrolyte beverage. Keep walking for a mile or so—your legs will recover faster because the walking pumps new blood in there, pushing the waste products out.

Throughout the afternoon: After a meal and a shower, walk for two to four more miles very easily—just keep the legs moving. Drink water, electrolyte beverages, citrus juice and eat some low fat protein with other carbohydrates. You've earned your food rewards, and you'll reload most effectively when you've eaten a good small meal within 30-60 minutes of the finish. You don't have to be a pig, just keep snacking all afternoon and evening. For the next few days, you may want to increase your consumption of vitamin C to speed up healing of little micro-tears in your muscles and tendons.

The next day: Walk for 30 to 60 minutes or more. The pace can be as slow as you wish, just keep moving. If you have soreness, the walking will work it out quicker than sitting on a couch.

Two days after—your return to running day: Start by walking for 5-10 minutes. Then, insert a one-minute run break, every three to five minutes. Stay out there for 30-60 minutes, adjusting the walking and running so that you feel comfortable and are not straining. The return to short segments of gentle running will speed up even more the recovery of race-weary muscles.

The Post Race Letdown: Even with the best preparation, however, there will be a natural motivational lull. When you've spent months working toward a specific event and you've reached the finish line of a significant physical test, even the most focused athletes experience a psychological letdown. The challenge has motivated you to be regular with your exercise, to keep pushing your endurance limits on long runs, and to reach down deep for motivation and the strength to go on. Like any almost unique lifetime accomplishments, the day of achievement is an emotional peak day, followed by a downturn. As soon as you fully grasp the reality that the "accomplishment doldrums" will occur, you can prepare for them and desensitize yourself to the negative effects. Talk yourself through this: "It's natural, after six months of preparation for the big day, to miss the focus, the commitment, and the reinforcement of others who supported me in my mission." But you can also tell yourself with honesty that in a few days you can be shrugging off the blues as you strike out in a new direction. So...let's get another mission started, NOW!

Another mission: So, let's get another mission started, now! Write the date of your next project on a calendar or in a journal. It's best to shift gears and select a different type of mission: a scenic trail run, a weekend trip to a big festival event, a group run with friends you haven't seen in a while, and so on. If you've trained in a group, schedule an easy group run three to four weeks after the race, and you'll look forward to the reunion. It's okay to shift missions in mid-stream, but be sure to have a specific event always written on the calendar. If you wait until after your first "mission day" to choose another goal, your letdown will be more severe.

The body follows your mental mission: The more you embrace your new mission in advance, the quicker you'll lose the aches and pains of the big race. Instead of wallowing in your misery, tell yourself that your muscles have achieved their "good tiredness" by overcoming a great challenge

- and you're still glowing from it. The positive mental momentum of your accomplishment will pull you through the few days immediately after when you may (or may not) feel that the legs don't want to run a step.

From Jeff Galloway's *Marathon You Can Do It!* (Shelter Publications, 2002),
For more info or to order, go to www.RunInjuryFree.com.