

Hal Higdon's MARATHON TRAINING GUIDE



Preparing to run 26 miles 385 yards

WHETHER YOU ARE A BEGINNER or an experienced marathoner, there is one very important item to consider before embarking on a marathon training program: your health. It's a good idea to get a physical examination featuring a stress test--particularly if you have not had one in several years. Though hundreds of thousands of runners finish marathons each year, please take this precaution.

Second, consider your business, family and social schedule for the next several months. Training for a marathon will take time, not only weekends but midweek as well, particularly as mileage builds toward the end of the program. It will also take energy. If there are other stresses in your life--such as studying for a law school exam or planning a wedding--maybe now is not the best time to run a marathon.

Once you have made the commitment, however, you *will* succeed! If you're a beginner who can give us your attention over the next 18 weeks, we'll get you to the finish line. If you're an experienced marathoner looking to give 26 miles 385 yards your best effort--maybe qualify for Boston--we can help.

The training programs for **The LaSalle Bank Chicago Marathon** follow. The reverse countdown begins with Week 18 and goes to Week 1 and the marathon. (After that, there's a Post-Marathon Training Schedule five weeks long to help you recover and get ready for your next race.) You'll find that these programs are *very* user-friendly. Tens of thousands of runners have successfully used them. Follow the schedules faithfully, pay attention to the directions, heed the tips, and you're almost guaranteed a happy marathon experience. I don't promise you that it's going to be easy to either train for or finish a marathon (if there were no challenge, why do it?), but this Marathon Training Guide definitely will allow you to fulfill your own potential as a runner.

Which of the four available schedules is best for you? Here is how to choose.

Novice: People differ greatly in ability. They differ in their fitness level, how much running or other forms of exercise they have in their backgrounds. Ideally, we recommend that before starting a marathon program, you should have been running about a year. You should be able to comfortably run distances between 3 and 6 miles. You should be training 3-5 days a week, averaging 15-25 miles a week. You should have run an occasional 5-K or 10-K race. Realistically, not everybody begins from this base. Particularly in the midst of this second marathon boom, those of us connected with the CARA program recognize that people are going to become inspired to run their first marathons with less preparation. Yes,

it is possible to run a marathon with less of a training base (particularly if you come from another sport), but the higher your fitness level, the easier this 18-week program will be.

For first-timers and those without much of a running background, I recently designed a [Spring Training](#) program: 12 weeks of pre-marathon training to get you ready to start this program. If you're uncertain of your fitness level--and assuming you have the time before your first marathon--you might want to start there before beginning this program.

The key to this and any marathon training program is the long runs on weekends, which build from 6 miles in Week 18 to 20 miles in the climactic Week 4. (After that, you taper to get ready for the marathon in Week 1.) You can skip an occasional workout, or juggle the schedule depending on other commitments, but do *not* cheat on the long runs. Notice that although the weekly long runs get progressively longer, every third week is a "stepback" week, where we reduce mileage to allow you to gather strength for the next push upward. Rest is an important component of any training program.

As the weekend mileage builds, the weekday mileage also builds. Add up the numbers, and you'll see that you run roughly the same mileage during the week as you do during long runs on the weekends. Midweek workouts on Wednesdays build from 3 to 10 miles. Cross-training (an hour or so of walking, biking, swimming or other exercises) will help you relax the day after your long runs.

Intermediate: There are two intermediate schedules in this program: Intermediate-I and Intermediate-II. Each represents a slight increase in difficulty, a transition between the Novice schedules discussed above and the Advanced schedules below. Once you have completed your first marathon using the Novice program, and you would like to improve on your Personal Record, then is the time to consider one of these programs, or the Advanced program. Some runners doing their first marathons may have been running for several years and figure they can skip directly to one of these programs--and maybe they can! Normally, however, I advise even experienced marathoners to select the Novice program for their first marathon. That's because the first marathon for any runner is going to be a peak experience. You want that experience to be as satisfactory as possible. If so, set the bar a bit low and focus on *finishing* rather than finishing in a specific time. Sure, if you have sufficient talent, you might be able to break 4:00, or 3:30, or even 3:00 your first time out. But if you guess wrong, train too hard, go out too fast or make various other training or racing errors, the last few miles may turn out to be a struggle, your hoped-for time may vanish before your eyes, and you even may not finish. You might not even make the starting line if you become injured or overtrained, because you worked too hard. For that reason, I usually advise even experienced runners--maybe *especially* experienced runners--to take it easy on themselves and go with the Novice program.

But there does come a time when runners *do* want to train hard, and harder. The Intermediate-I program offers a slight jump in difficulty from the Novice program. You start with a long run of 8 miles instead of 6 miles in Week 18. You get to 20 miles for your long run by Week 6, which permits a second 20-miler in Week 4. (Long runs, by the way, should *not* be done at marathon pace. Slower than race pace works best for reasons I'll explain elsewhere.) Mid-week mileage is slightly higher, but instead of cross-training on the weekend, you get more serious about your running and do a second run of 5-8 miles, often at marathon race pace. You do your cross-training on Monday, instead of resting. The bar has been raised.

The bar is raised even higher for the Intermediate-II schedules. Now you begin in Week 18 with a 10-mile long run, which brings you to 20 miles by Week 8, permitting *three* runs at this distance. The midweek runs are somewhat longer; the pace runs on the weekend are somewhat longer. The pattern is about the same as Intermediate-I, but there is a subtle, but important, increase in distance and difficulty. If you chose Intermediate-I as the training schedule for your second marathon and have success, you might want to choose Intermediate-II for marathon number 3.

Advanced: Only the most experienced runners--the brave of heart--want to try the Advanced program. It is tough. You're going to sweat. The workouts on the weekends follow the same pattern as the intermediate schedules, but now you do more difficult midweek training. Tuesdays are devoted to speedwork, a combination of hill repeats, interval training and tempo runs. Thursdays feature tempo runs and more training at marathon race pace. (If you don't know all what these terms mean, I'll explain them as we go along, but that's one more reason why this schedule may not be for you.) Another change is that Wednesdays are rest days to allow you to recover between the tough Tuesday and Thursday workouts. Please note--and I will emphasize this again and again--that I do *not* recommend doing your long runs at marathon pace. This adds too much stress, particularly when coupled with the other hard workouts. If you overtrain, your performance will suffer.

Admittedly, not everybody wants to do speedwork, or enjoys going to the track. If that is you, stick with the intermediate schedules. But sometimes there comes a time in every runner's life when he or she wants to take it to the limit.

The choice is yours. Figure out which one of my marathon training schedules you want to try. Then lace up your running shoes. It is time to begin!

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