



Half Marathon Run Guide

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Get Ready To Run!

We're excited to be part of your journey—whether you're training for a marathon or getting out the door for the first time.

Here are some of our favorite features to help you take your skills to the next level.



Choose your activity.

Running, cycling, walking, wheelchair—you can track it all.



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Get on beat with Spotify or your music library.



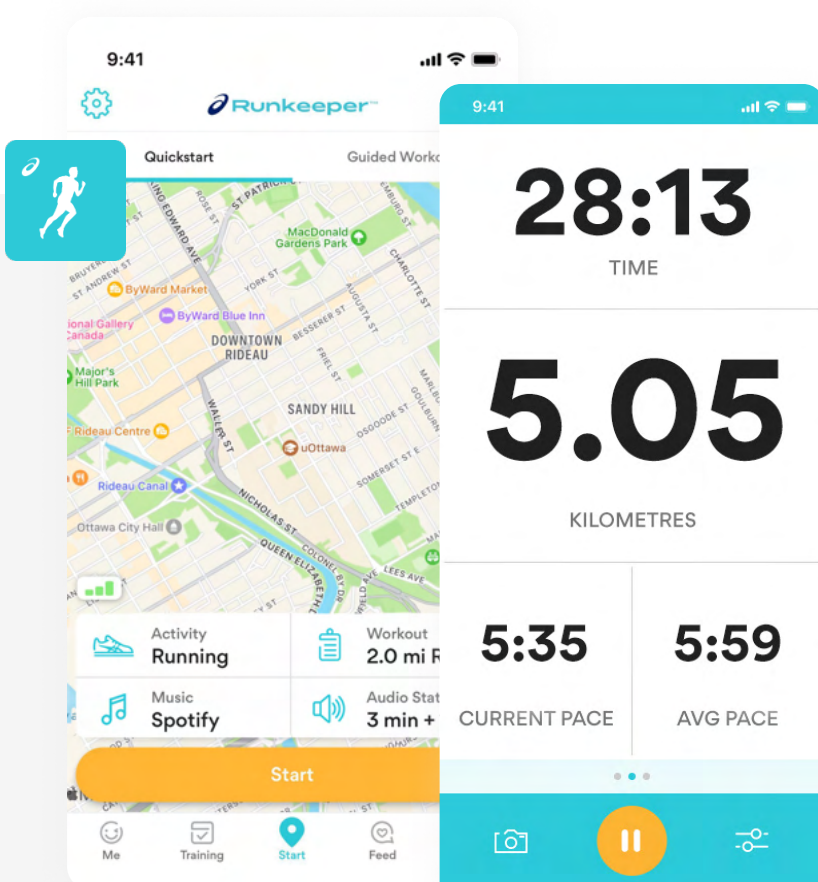
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Hear updates on your time, distance, or pace as you go.



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Goals

So, you want to run a half marathon. First of all, congratulations. Signing up for a half marathon is a major milestone—whether it's your first or 50th—and you should be proud of yourself for making a commitment to show up and put in the work. Maybe you're a newer runner looking to do something you never thought you could, or maybe you're leveling up from a 5k, 10k, or preparing yourself to conquer a marathon. Whatever your situation, you can trust that you're in good hands, and that we're here to get you to the finish line.

But before we get started, let's talk about goals—namely why you should have goals and how to set your own.

The importance of setting goals in running

Goal-setting in general has proven to have immense benefits and power. Goals hold us accountable, give us purpose, and demand our concerted effort and commitment. They serve as a reward system—they reinforce positive habits and behaviors both while we're trying to accomplish them and after we accomplish them. Running goals, in particular, give us motivation and allow us to tailor our training to achieve the outcomes we want. Plus, they keep us going when we feel like giving up.

What to remember when setting your goals

1. Ask yourself: What is the motivating factor behind the goal?

Training can be difficult without a light at the end of the tunnel—and you choose the light, so make it something you actually care about! Your goal has to matter to YOU. Not anyone else. When your goal is truly meaningful, you're more likely to stay committed to pursuing it.

2. Be specific!

Goals should be specific in the sense that they're clear (so there's no confusion about what you're expecting of yourself) and quantifiable (able to be tracked and measured). The more specific the goal, the better directed your race training can be.

Examples could be: “I want to run a half marathon in under 2 hours,” or “I want to finish a half marathon, period.” For your first goal, you would want to enroll in a training plan that prepares you to run that pace for 21.1 kilometres through a mixture of speed and endurance work. The second goal tells you that your training should focus on running consistently and progressively increasing your mileage until you can comfortably run close to a half marathon (16 or more kilometres). See, your goals inform your training!

3. Set multiple goals—some that are balanced and some that are big and scary.

We also recommend setting several “sub-goals” as well as different types of goals. Each runner should have a mix of performance-related and non-performance related goals, as well as balanced and “aim high” goals. You can share these goals with whomever you want, but keep in mind that negativity and doubt will not help you, so share your “big and scary” goals with those who will support and inspire you as you work towards them.



Let’s say your overarching goal is to run a half marathon in under 2 hours.
Here’s what your goal spread could look like.

- I want to run a half marathon in under 2 hours. (Overarching goal)
- I want to run one kilometre in under 5 minutes and 40 seconds. (Interim/sub goal)
- I’m going to strive to run this half marathon in under 1 hour and 55 minutes, so 5:27 km pace. (Aim high, big and scary goal)
- I want to cross the finish line feeling happy and accomplished.
(Non-performance goal)
- I want to run a half marathon without having to stop. (Non-time related goal)

The purpose of setting multiple goals with various purposes is to strike a balance between challenging yourself and being realistic, and that you're content no matter what happens. No one wants to cross the finish line feeling like they have no reason to be proud of themselves, especially when finishing the race is reason enough to celebrate!

Note: When setting any goal, it's worth considering your current life situation. If you recently had a child, changed jobs, moved to a new home, or had another significant life event or stressor in your path, you may not be in the right headspace to run your fastest race ever. The key to a happy race experience is to reach high while still managing your expectations.



4. Learn from your last race.

For those who have run a half marathon before, your past experience should inform your upcoming race. You know how to train, what to wear, what to expect, and more—so use this insight to set your goals! Maybe you want to beat your previous time, stay injury-free throughout training, or you have a new health goal you're striving for. Our past performance in races can clue us into what our goals can and should look like for subsequent races. They show us what we're capable of, and give us an idea of what's within reach.



5. Take it seriously, but don't forget to enjoy yourself.

Sometimes runners get so caught up in their time and performance that training makes them miserable and they start to dread it. Training for races (and running the race) can be demanding, but it should still be a net-positive, enjoyable experience! If you notice that running leaves you feeling discouraged or resentful, try taking a step back and reevaluating your goals.



Completion vs. performance-related goals

The goals you set for this half marathon will depend on what you're looking to get out of it—and chances are, they'll primarily be completion or performance-related.

Setting Completion Goals

If you haven't run many half marathons, your goal may be to finish the race and feel reasonably good at the end. Completion goals are ideal for beginners and runners who want to enjoy the race without added pressure, but they can work for anyone!

A completion goal can be a powerful motivator—you know you just have to cross the finish line; it doesn't have to be pretty. Runners who are hypercritical of their performance (to a point where a race isn't fun or “worth it” unless they beat their past times) can benefit from a completion goal, as it can take excess stress off their backs.

For completion goals, it's crucial to stick to your training plan and stay consistent with your recovery and nutrition. Running a race at any pace requires effort, and you want your body to be in good form on race day.

Setting performance goals

If you're an intermediate or advanced runner, your goals will probably be tied to your performance and time. This is assuming you've run a half marathon—or a similar distance—before, and you have a log of your previous times (or at least, your baseline kilometre time).



Step 1: Set a realistic time goal.

To set a performance-related goal for your half marathon, take a look at your training and time logs. You want to set a realistic and feasible time goal (aka if you've never run a 4:30 kilometre before, you can't expect to run 21.1 kms where you average 4:30 per kilometre).

Maybe this goal is a time you've done before or know you can run even on a bad day.



Step 2: Set a reach goal.

From there, you can set your “reach” goal—a time you're capable of hitting, but it will require a solid effort and everything falling into place on race day (nutrition, sleep, no injuries).



Step 3: Set a silent goal.

Last, set a “silent” goal. This is a strategy used by Coach Corinne, who is always encouraging her athletes to dream big. Your silent goal is one that you'd really have to believe in yourself and dig deep to achieve. A goal that would be exciting to hit, but that you aren't expecting to hit if the conditions aren't right.

Say that your realistic goal for your half marathon is to run it in 2 hours (which would be about 5:40 per km pace). Your silent goal could be running it in under 1 hour and 54 minutes (about 5:24 per km pace). Shaving 16 seconds off your per kilometre time (and maintaining that pace for 21.1 km) wouldn't necessarily be an easy feat, but if the conditions were right—you slept well, the weather was great, your family showed up to watch you, and you felt that race day adrenaline—it's a time you may be able to pull off.

Once you land on your performance-based goals, make sure you have a way to track your progress. The [ASICS Runkeeper™ app](#) keeps a log of your mileage, split times, your post-run mood, and much more. Having these records makes it easy to monitor your improvement and stay on course to hit your goals.

Bottom line: Setting goals for yourself, whatever they are, can be immensely helpful as you train for your upcoming half marathon. Be realistic, stay consistent, and if you fall off the wagon, catch up to it and keep going!



For more information on goal setting, check out these articles on the Runkeeper blog:

- [How To Set Realistic Running Goals \(And How To Achieve Them\)](#)
- [How To Set Running Goals You'll Actually Achieve](#)
- [How To Get Your Goals Back On Track](#)

Training

Training for a half marathon is like embarking on a journey. It requires preparation, time, and commitment—and at times, especially the beginning, that can feel daunting. Not everyone considers themselves a “runner,” and it’s easy to get discouraged if you’re new to running, or if your expectations of training don’t align with your reality.

That said, the hardest part of any training cycle is taking the first step—and we're here to make it easier for you. (And to be clear, if you run, you're a runner. It's that simple.)

What makes a half marathon different than other races

While there are similarities between a half marathon and other distances, like a 10k or 10 miler, a half marathon demands a higher level of commitment to running and training. It's not a race you can just wake up and do—it takes time, effort, and sometimes a little sacrifice.

To be clear: The end result (running a half marathon) is worth it. But if you've never run a half before—and have perhaps run other, shorter races—there are several differences to keep in mind...

Training for a half marathon takes several months.

When you train for a 5k or 10k race, the time you spend preparing can range from 5 weeks (for a 5k) to 16 weeks (for a 10k). In comparison, half marathon training plans range from 10 to 16 weeks (3 to 4 months), sometimes less if you're an experienced runner.

You'll run more mileage (and days) per week.

Most half marathon training programs will recommend running 3 to 5 times a week. Weekly mileage can range from a little less than 32 km per week to around 80 km per week, depending on your experience level. Your long runs will also be higher mileages when training for a half marathon as compared to a 5k or 10k. That said, many training plans only have you run 16 km before your 21.1 km race. Believe it or not, that's enough to get you to the finish line! For more higher mileage runners who have a high training frequency, your longest run will likely be between 16 and 20 km.

You'll need to rest and recover more.

Like we said, half marathon training lasts 3 to 4 months, and you'll be logging a good amount of mileage all the while. This means that, if you want to stay injury-free and be able to run on race day, you have no choice but to take your recovery and rest time seriously. You should be striving for eight or so hours of sleep per night, stretching regularly, and taking 1 to 2 rest days each week (or cross-training, depending on what your training plan advises).

Now that you have a better idea of what to expect and how to approach training, let's get into it!

Step 1: Get your hands on the right training plan.

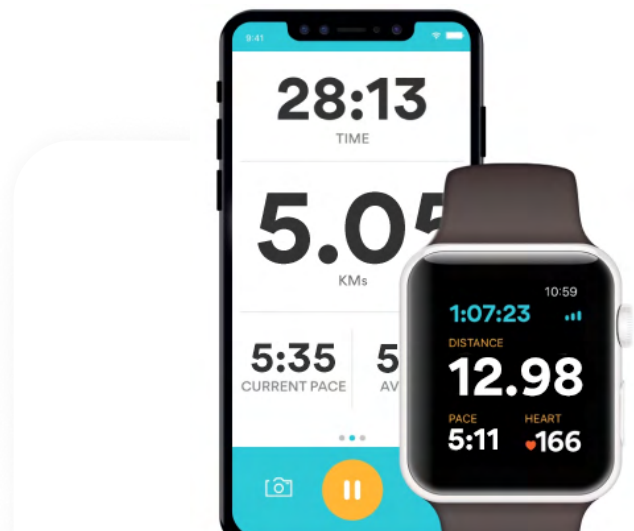
When looking for a training plan, [there are certain criteria you should keep in mind](#) (and questions you should ask yourself before starting it).

The first is the source. Where is this training plan coming from? Who wrote it? Have other runners completed it? You want a training plan that's been created or approved by an expert, like a certified running coach or professional runner. The more experts that endorse the plan—and runners that have seen success with it—the better.

Second, you want a plan that is realistic for you. Many training programs are generic in the sense that they're created with the "average" beginner, intermediate, or expert runner in mind. They're designed to appeal to a large number of runners, but on the flipside, they're not tailored to your specific schedule, your lifestyle, or even your fitness level. A training plan that's customized for you is ideal.

Third, choose a program that keeps you accountable and allows you to grow—a plan that feels both rewarding and fulfilling, and lets you track your progress. A poorly designed program may rush you into long runs before you're ready, give you workouts without explanation, or overwhelm you with its length and complexity. To us, that's a hard pass.

Your training program is at the crux of your race experience, so it's important to find a plan that you can trust and commit to. And while there's a slew of training plans out there that you can spend time sifting through, we recommend downloading the [Runkeeper app](#) and checking out our individualized race training plans.



When you sign up for the Runkeeper app, you'll choose your race distance, input your race date, and then answer some questions about your preferences. How many days a week are you able to train? What is your goal race time, if you have one? Each of our plans are built to fit the training requirement of your race distance, and we're always updating them based on feedback from our coaches and runners like you.

To get access to our half marathon training plans, download the Runkeeper app and start our free [90-day Runkeeper Go trial!](#)

Step 2: Manage your expectations —training is hard work!

It's common for runners to go into training bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, but training isn't all sunshine and rainbows. It's rewarding and exciting, but still, it requires serious effort! There will be plenty of ups and downs—you'll have days where your run doesn't go as planned, you don't want to run, or you miss a scheduled run because something unexpected comes up. The key to making it through your training is to manage your expectations.

What you can expect to happen during your training

(Hint: You will get through these.)

- **You probably won't adhere to your training program 100 percent of the time.** That's okay! Listen to your body—when you don't, you open the door for injuries and burnout.
- **There will be days when you don't want to run.** Even professional runners have days like these. You'll learn ways to stay motivated in the Motivation section of this guide. Some days getting out there for a walk will be enough to keep up your motivation.
- **There will also be days when the weather isn't ideal.** You can't control what happens outside, but you can control whether or not you lace up and go for it. [More tips on handling unpredictable conditions here.](#)
- **You may get injured, or deal with new aches and pains.** Running is physically taxing, and your body may not be used to this level of work. You'll read more on how to deal with this in the Injuries section.
- **You will want to compare yourself to other runners.** This is a slippery slope, and rarely is it productive. Stay focused on your end goal not someone else's.

“

Truth is: Training is not a piece of cake. It's a challenge with a worthwhile reward. You get out of the experience what you put into it, and if you're consistent through the good times and bad times alike, you will be successful.

Step 3:

Learn to love the process.

Race training is made up of many parts—from your pre-run warmups and stretches to your long runs and workouts. Our advice is to learn to love each part. Race day is only one day—the bulk of your experience is the time you put into training. We become so focused on the destination (the finish line) that we forget to appreciate and enjoy the journey. Take the time during training to acknowledge your consistent effort, discipline, and positive mindset. Be proud of your hard work, and let it push you further. There will be ebbs and flows at various points along the way, but if you stay patient and consistent, you'll be prepared on race day.





Step 4:

Run like the wind!

Now you have the knowledge and tools you need to literally hit the ground running. Select a training plan, level your expectations, immerse yourself in the process, and then get yourself out the door! At the end of the day, you only have to start. Put one foot in front of the other, believe in yourself, and let go of perfection. Training isn't easy, but it's the winding roads, ups and downs, and challenges and successes that make you not only a better runner, but a more resilient, strong-willed, and driven individual.

Bonus Half Marathon Tips from Runkeeper Coach Corinne Fitzgerald



**CORINNE
FITZGERALD**
Coach

1. Be flexible.

The training cycle for a half marathon is usually 12 to 16 weeks. There will be days and workouts that you miss... because life happens! But learning to hop back on the train after missing a day or two is important. There is no room for an “all or nothing” attitude.

2. Stay focused.

The half, much like the marathon, is no joke. I know it has become mainstream and everyone knows someone who knows someone that jumped into a half marathon without training and finished. But the goal isn't just to finish, it's to get to the end with a sense of accomplishment and to feel good about it. If you're going to do something, do it well with purpose and pride.

3. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

To properly train for a half marathon, you need to be comfortable getting uncomfortable. In order to do that, you have to “go there” in practice and training runs, and experience what it’s like to run on tired legs. Longer tempo runs and some faster minutes at the end of a long run are two ways to find the strength through challenge.

4. Take in calories along the way.

Having one energy gel or source of quick energy during your half marathon can make all the difference in how you perform. If your half marathon is longer than 90 minutes, you may want to plan on having more fuel on you. It is possible to “hit the wall” in a half marathon, so being properly hydrated and fuelled is important. You should also be testing out the fuelling times (i.e. when you eat your gel) during your long training runs.



Gear

Before you can start training for a road race, you have to get your hands on some running gear. Now, it may seem straightforward—you only need sneakers and headphones, right?—but your gear plays a major role in your performance, both during your training and on race day itself.

So before you jump in, you'll need a few things...

Disclaimer: All recommendations in this section are the writer's individual opinion and do not represent the opinion of any entity whatsoever.

Shoes

Running shoes are an important piece of any runner's attire. Before you choose a shoe, it's important to understand your stride. Each running shoe has a different level of cushioning and support and is designed for a specific kind of runner. Consult an expert at your local running store.

In terms of foot strike (the way your foot hits the ground), runners tend to fall into one of three categories: [overpronation, underpronation, or neutral](#). Overpronation (common in people with low arches or flat feet) means your foot tends to roll inward when you run. Underpronation (common in people with high arches) means your foot tends to roll outward. If you're a neutral runner with normal pronation, that means the force and impact of your foot striking the ground is equally distributed.

While none of these types of pronation are inherently "bad," knowing which category you fall under can help you choose the right running shoe and, in turn, reduce the risk of injury.

For overpronators...

Overpronators typically feel great in shoes with added stability, heel cushioning, and a firm midsole. The ASICS [GEL-KAYANO® 28](#) and [GT-2000™ 10](#), for example, are designed for overpronation—so runners wearing these can expect their shoe and stride to stay stable and consistent throughout their runs.



GEL-KAYANO® 28



GT-2000™ 10

For underpronators...

Underpronators usually opt for shoes with extra cushioning (like the [GEL-NIMBUS®23](#), [NOVABLAST™ 2](#), or [GEL-CUMULUS® 23](#)), as they want to minimize the impact their foot feels when they run.



GEL-NIMBUS® 23



NOVABLAST™ 2



GEL-CUMULUS® 23

For neutral runners...

Neutral pronators can wear a variety of shoes and often choose either neutral cushioned shoes or natural running shoes, like the [GLIDERIDE™ 2](#) or [DYNABLAST 2™](#). (You don't have to remember all of this, by the way, it's all in our [Pronation Guide](#).)



GLIDERIDE™ 2



DYNABLAST 2™

Nowadays, many running stores have experts on staff who can assess your stride and assist you. Many stores even have treadmills or let you take a quick jog around to give you a sense of how the shoes will feel in action. We encourage you to visit your local running store to meet with a shoe specialist, or use our [Shoe Finder](#)! Bells and whistles aside, you need a shoe that's comfortable for you when you run (and you should replace them every 300 to 500 miles, or four to six months).

Socks

We cannot say this enough: **DO NOT SKIMP ON SOCKS**. Yes, it's tempting to throw on whatever you have in your drawer, but we're telling you now, that's a mistake. Why? Because everyday life socks are made of cotton, and cotton is kind of a runner's worst enemy.

Cotton absorbs moisture, and when you mix that moisture with the heat and friction your feet generate when you run, you're setting yourself up for painful blisters, calluses, and hot spots. Instead, look for socks made of synthetic fibers, like polyester, spandex, and nylon—anything non-cotton is better than cotton. These fibers are moisture-wicking, meaning when they get wet, they don't stay wet. Moisture-wicking socks will keep your feet as dry as possible, which is crucial for avoiding blisters. We also recommend socks with heel tabs for anyone prone to heel blisters. With socks, it's important to train with them leading up to race day to avoid any unsavory surprises.

Bottom line: Invest in socks. Moisture-wicking socks made of anything but cotton, like [UNISEX NIMBUS PLUS™ single tab](#), and [UNISEX PERFORMANCE 2 NO SHOW](#), and [MEN'S CUSHION™ QUARTER](#).



UNISEX NIMBUS PLUS™
single tab



UNISEX PERFORMANCE 2 NO
SHOW



MEN'S CUSHION QUARTER

Tops & bottoms

The clothes you choose to run in will depend heavily on several factors: the temperature, your body type, and your personal preference.

Dressing for temperature can be a little tricky, because your body will heat up as you run. In general when choosing what to wear, add 10 to 15 degrees to whatever the temperature is outside. That's what it'll actually feel like once you're running (the "Real Feel," if you will).



Here are a few general guidelines to consider when selecting your running outfit:

When it's below 0 degrees, you'll probably need...

- [A tank top](#) or [short sleeve shirt](#) base layer, [a long sleeve shirt](#), and [a cold weather running jacket](#). [A vest](#) would also suffice, if you prefer that to a jacket
- [Full-length running tights](#). (Your ankles will get cold if you don't cover them, trust us.)
- Make sure your feet, ears, head, and hands are covered. That means wearing [gloves](#), [a headband](#), and/or [a hat](#)
- As always, wear [good quality, moisture-wicking socks](#)

For temperatures in the 5 to 10 degree range...

- A base layer and an outer layer (e.g. a tank top and long sleeve shirt or [zip-up jacket](#))
- Full-length running tights (or shorter if you tend to run hot)
- Optional gloves

When it's 10 to 15 degrees outside, you may want to wear...

- A [t-shirt](#) and tights ([full-length](#) or [capri](#)) OR [shorts](#) with a long-sleeve shirt
- For cold runners, a long sleeve and tights will work, too.

15 to 20 degrees, opt for...

- A short sleeve running shirt or [tank top](#)
- Running shorts or capris
- Optional long sleeve or longer tights for those who run cold

For anything 20 to 25 degrees...

- A tank top
- Running shorts or capris (preferably with mesh so they're breathable)

Now, for 25 degrees and up...

- You're going to want clothes that are very lightweight and breathable.
- A tank top and shorts, both made of synthetic materials that wick moisture
- And hey, if you want to run in [a sports bra](#) or shirtless, go for it!

Running gear for women

For women, finding [supportive sports bras](#) and [moisture-wicking clothing](#) should be a priority. (Again, you'll want to avoid cotton.) Keeping a selection of long and short sleeve shirts, tank tops, shorts, and running tights or leggings on hand will help you be ready for any temperature. [A rain jacket designed for runners](#) is also a wise:

Try on running clothes in-store, if you can, or order from a site with free returns. Shorts, leggings, and sports bras, in particular, come in tons of different sizes, lengths, and styles, and some will be more comfortable for your body type than others.

Running gear for men

Men should also seek out [moisture-wicking clothes](#) including short and long sleeve shirts, tank tops, and even singlets (many competitive male runners like this fit). In terms of shorts, men can opt for either shorts with netting (which is essentially built-in underwear) or shorts without netting, worn with spandex shorts underneath. Men's running shorts also come in a variety of lengths and styles—no one length or style is “better” than the other, it's simply about personal comfort. For colder temps, tights are a worthwhile option and can be worn under running shorts.



Essential accessories

Now that you have the necessary equipment to get yourself to the starting line, it's time to figure out if you need any "essential accessories." These are items that address any issues you run into during your training—aka products or gear that make you more comfortable when you run and/or keep your body safe.

For example, some runners experience chafing—when skin repeatedly rubs against clothing or other skin, causing friction and irritation—on their inner thighs, buttocks, groins, nipples, feet, or armpits. The result is usually a rash of small red bumps. If you start to notice that certain parts of your body chafe during your training, you'll want to add an anti-chafing balm or Vaseline to your list of running gear. Chafing is painful and needs time to heal—and if it's happening during training, you can expect it on race day. It's beneficial to be prepared!

Other essentials could include sunscreen (to avoid sunburn), [a running buff](#) (to use as a mask, if needed), sunglasses (to keep the sun out of your eyes), or prescription orthotics (to decrease foot pain).

Anything that solves a problem you're having, consider it an essential accessory.



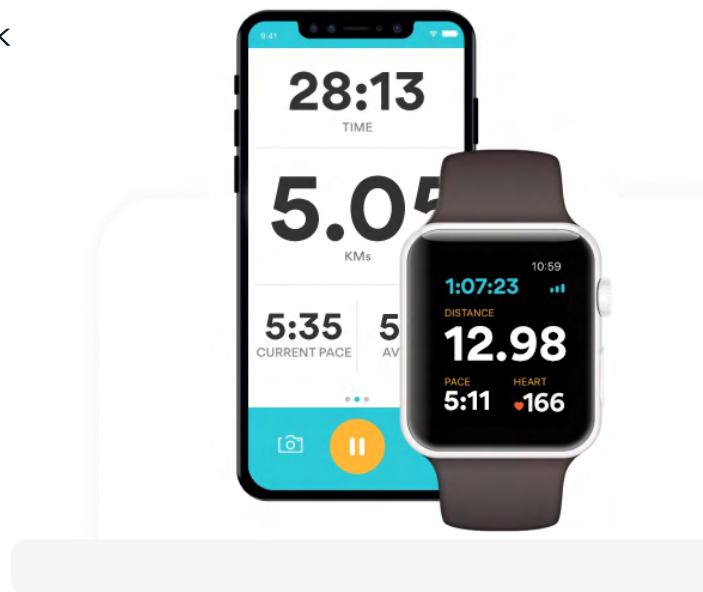
ASICS FACE GAITER

“Nice to have” extras

Once you've decided on your running attire and secured other necessities, it's worth asking yourself: "Do I have what I need to start training?" Fundamentally, the answer is yes—you now have what you need to run safely—but we're unique human beings with our own preferences, and sometimes extra running gear can make the training and race experience more enjoyable.

A GPS running watch

It isn't a necessity in the sense that you can run without one. But for someone who wants to track their distance and keep a log of their runs, it can be a useful tool (although, the [Runkeeper app](#) will do that for you, too). Similarly, not everyone likes to wear a hat or carry a handheld water bottle while running, but if it makes your experience better, go for it! It's awesome if you know what your needs are upfront (you like seeing your data afterward, love listening to music, etc.), but if you don't, that's okay, you'll find out as you start training!



Recs from our coaches

Choosing your running gear will be a very personal experience, and you have to go with what works best for you. But it never hurts to get a little input from the experts. Here are a few items our coaches never run without.



Advanced GPS Watch

Nearly all of our coaches said that they use an advanced GPS running watch for their training. In addition to distance-tracking, pace, heart rate, and daily steps, advanced watches offer features such as a compass, elevation tracking, stride length, training load insights, and more. If you need help staying accountable and like to see your running and daily activity stats, this is a solid choice.



MAGIC SPEED™

SPEED SERIES™

For speed work and harder workouts, our coaches love the SPEED SERIES™. Designed for racing or regular training runs, the SPEED SERIES™ offers the versatility you need to move your body and your mind towards a new personal best. Made to propel your foot forward, GUIDESOLE™ technology creates a smooth rolling sensation as you move through your stride. By stacking the midsole with FF BLAST™ cushioning, this series has a responsive feel to your step while keeping the shoe lightweight.

[Show SPEED SERIES™](#)

Wireless headphones or earbuds

Coach Corinne says these headphones have been a game changer for her runs. Wireless headphones in general are a smart choice for runners—cords and wires can get tangled up while you're running, and syncing your headphones to your phone via Bluetooth means you even don't have to hold your phone (you can put it in an armband, a hip belt, etc.).



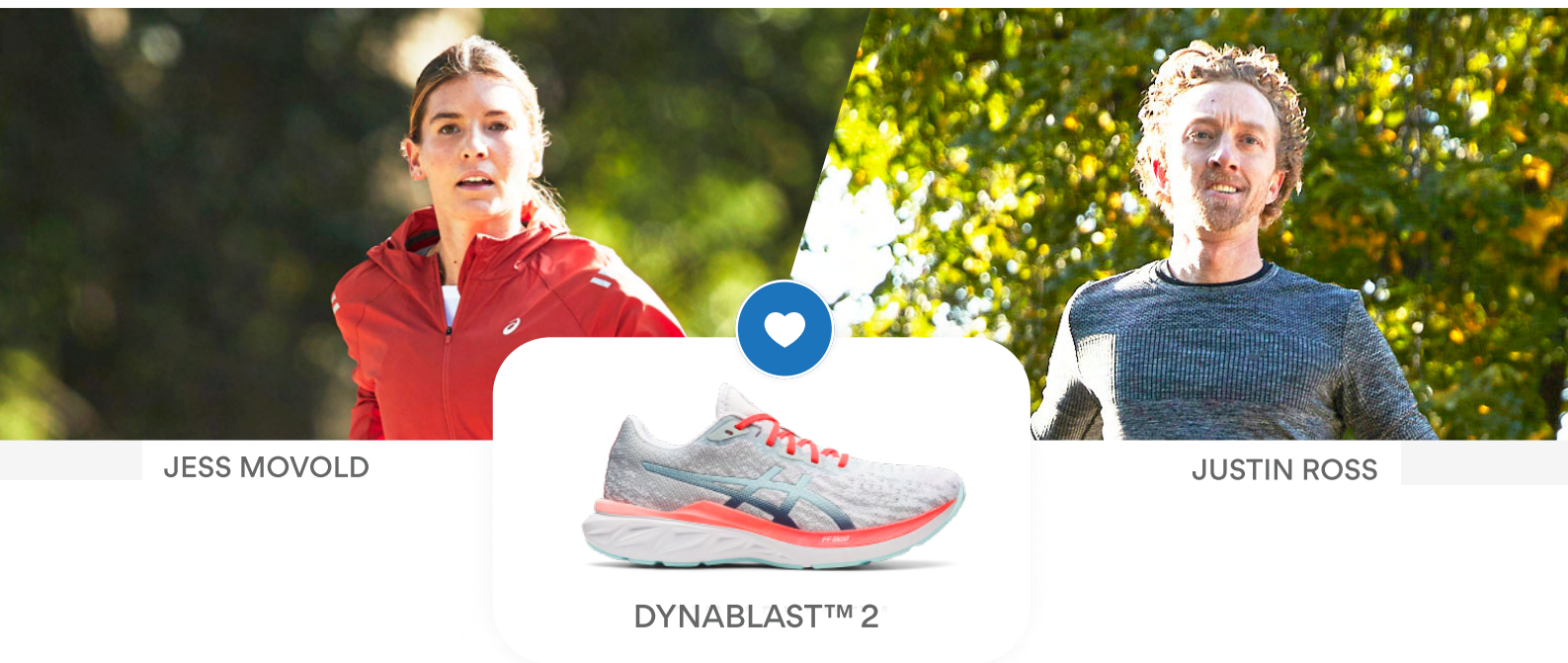
CORINNE

Energy chews

Marathoners and half marathoners often find it beneficial to carry energy chews, goos, or easy snacks with them during their race and long runs to keep them fuelled. Look for energy chews that have a short ingredient list and contain no added colorants, preservatives, or flavors.

Easy mileage shoes

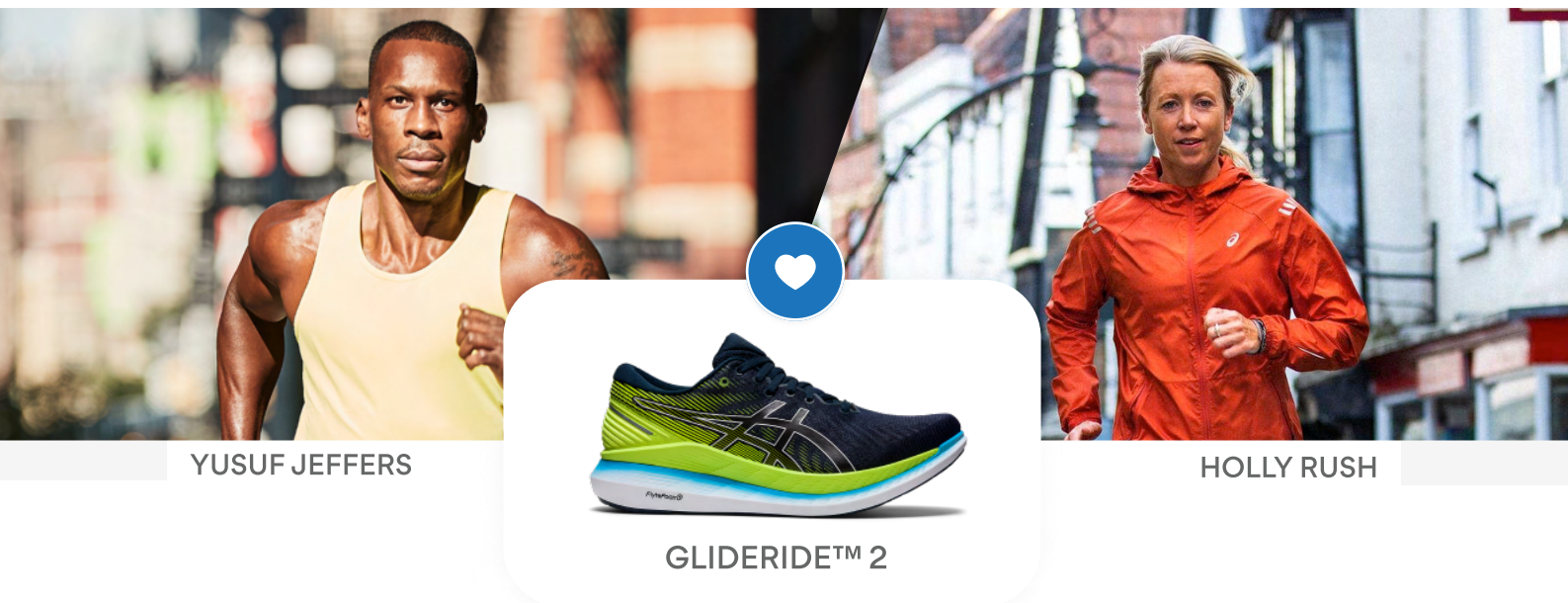
Each coach has their own go-to shoe for logging weekly mileage while race training. Coaches Jess Movold and Justin Ross love the [DYNABLAST™ 2](#), because they're comfortable and lightweight for easy runs, while Yusuf Jeffers and Holly Rush favor the [GLIDERIDE™ 2](#). Each running shoe is designed for specific types of running, so it's worth looking at all the options and narrowing your search based on your needs. For stability and cushioning, check out the [GLIDERIDE™2](#), [GEL-KAYANO® 28](#), and [GEL-NIMBUS®23](#).



JESS MOVOLD

JUSTIN ROSS

DYNABLAST™ 2



YUSUF JEFFERS

HOLLY RUSH

GLIDERIDE™ 2



GEL-KAYANO® 28



GEL-NIMBUS® 23

And if you feel overwhelmed by all the options, head over to our [Shoe Finder](#) to find your perfect match.

Hydration pack

Another marathoner tool: hydration packs! Like all gear, whether or not you choose to carry a hydration pack should solely be based on whether or not you run better with it. Coach Holly, a long-time marathon and ultra-marathon runner, likes hydration packs that come with silicone bottles because they're easier to refill when racing. Brands like CamelBak and Nathan make these.

Injuries

We can't talk about running, or really any form of exercise, without talking about injuries. Running places a high demand on our bodies—it requires a large number of our muscles and bones to function in specific ways—which means there is room for error and injury.

Injuries are unpredictable and sometimes inevitable (even the healthiest of individuals get injured), but there are measures you can take to minimize your risk of injury, and ways to heal injuries that can speed up your recovery. We asked Runkeeper's resident physical therapist and long-time runner Rachel Tavel, PT, DPT, CSCS, for her advice on staying injury-free throughout race training.



RACHEL TAVEL

Doctor of Physical Therapy,
Certified Strength and
Conditioning Specialist, &
Avid Runner

How to reduce the risk of injury when training for a race (and how to avoid overtraining)

The majority of running injuries come from overtraining—so an effective way to avoid injuries is to pace yourself. Overtraining (always training and not giving your body adequate time to recover) can be avoided by adhering to a custom training plan, taking rest days, and listening to your body. That may sound cliché, but your body is pretty self-aware—if you pay close attention to it, you'll know when you're fine and when you should scale back.

In general, preventing injuries boils down to four principles:

1. Slow & Steady:

Ramp up your training gradually and mindfully

2. Stretch & Strengthen:

Support your increases in mileage with a proper stretching and strengthening regimen

3. Eat & Recover:

Include proper nutrition and recovery strategies

4. Check In:

Stay aware and tuned-in to your body



What these principles look like in action

When you sign up for a race, it's all too easy to jump into your training feeling eager and overzealous—which can lead to you taking on too much, way too fast. That's why adhering to an expert-approved training plan is so essential. Strength training plays a role in reducing the risk of injury, as it provides a more solid and stable foundation for building mileage.

As you get into the half-marathon and longer distances, nutrition and recovery play an increasingly important role. We recommend referring to our Nutrition section throughout your training, and taking breaks and rest days as noted in your training plan (and more, if needed).

Half marathon training runs are on the longer side, so it's to be expected that your legs will get tired, which can lead to clumsy footing and missteps like rolling an ankle. Later in this section, we'll show you how to avoid such injuries. And remember: Every training run should be prefaced with a warm-up, like dynamic stretching and a few minutes of slow and steady jogging.

The chances of you getting injured will never be zero (there's always some risk), but if you take the right precautions, you can increase your chances of avoiding them!

How to properly recover between runs

Another mistake runners often make is thinking that the more time they spend running, the more prepared they'll be for the race. They cut back on their recovery time, and before you know it, they're nursing an overtraining injury. To be clear: It doesn't matter if this is your first race or your fiftieth—your body needs time to recover and rest between runs to reduce the risk of injury and avoid burn out.

To properly recover between runs, focus on getting eight hours of sleep, stretching after your runs, eating enough protein (see Nutrition section), and taking rest days. Our Runkeeper Half Marathon Training Plans have rest days

built into them and are customized for your specific schedule, race date, and goals. There's no glory in skipping rest days and working your body into the ground.

Many long-time runners have developed their own recovery routines, employing techniques like self massage and foam rolling, as well as ice baths and muscle relief balms. Here are a few tips from Runkeeper coach Alain Saint-Dic on how to recover throughout race training.



ALAIN

Coach

3 recovery strategies from Coach Alain

1. Hydration
2. Mobility and flexibility
3. Self myofascial release

Hydration should be your top priority—not just from a dry-lipped, parched point of view. By staying hydrated, you increase the efficiency of nice, fluid blood transport throughout the body. This means more oxygen and nutrients for your muscles and joints, and better circulation while you're training and racing.

Runners should focus on a combination of **mobility and flexibility**. When thinking about mobility, think about maintaining an optimal range of motion and movement in the joints. I love anything that opens up the hips and prevents the lower back from tightening up as you run: 90/90's, T-spine openers, World's greatest stretch, and banded hip distractions. For flexibility, keep in mind that the body works as one unit, made of many parts. Isolated stretches for tight body parts don't usually produce optimal results. Always make time for a full-body stretch. Target your hip flexors, quads, hamstrings, lower back, calves, lats, and neck. The top cost-effective technique for "static" stretching is contract release or PNF stretching.

In terms of recovery tools, my favourite portable one is a lacrosse ball. It's an inexpensive and effective piece of equipment that's easy to bring with you wherever you go. I use it in place of my foam roller for **self myofascial release**. *I find it gets deeper into your muscles because of the smaller surface area.*

Aside from these techniques, you want to make sure you're getting enough sleep (typically eight hours per night) and eating a well-rounded, high-quality diet (see Nutrition section). And if you find you're experiencing a lot of pain between runs, don't hesitate to see a physical therapist or sports medicine specialist—sometimes we need a bit of hands-on work to keep our bodies running at full capacity.

How much rest time should you take between runs?

Rest should be proportional, to some extent, to the workload you're doing. That way, your body has a chance to recover and rebuild itself. But in reality, your rest time also depends on baseline fitness. A beginner, for example, will require more rest than an advanced runner who can recover just fine by doing an active recovery session (a light jog, walk, bike ride, etc.). When training for a half marathon, often "rest days" aren't total rest days—they're more like lower intensity runs that allow your body to recover. If you choose to not take full rest days, make sure to keep the volume and intensity of your run or workout below a level that challenges your body to adapt. Your body cannot fully recover if you're constantly demanding more of it with no break. But again, every runner is different, and you should take full rest days and active recovery days as you need them. So long as you stay committed to your plan, you'll be in good shape to run a half marathon.



How to deal with soreness, fatigue, and exhaustion

At various times throughout your training, you'll inevitably experience soreness, fatigue, and exhaustion. Don't worry, this is all par for the course!

Soreness occurs after we exercise at a vigorous intensity (at a level above our body's current fitness level). When we exercise at this level, we create microscopic tears in our muscles, which our body repairs while we sleep, take rest days, etc. This muscle repair process is part of our body's overall adaptation—when we put stress on the body (in this case running), it adapts and becomes stronger in order to accommodate and handle that stress. But while it does that, we feel soreness, and soreness usually lasts a few days.

Soreness usually peaks two days post-activity and then tapers off in the days following. Each runner encounters sore muscles at one point or another, but it's very common for new runners, runners who are coming back from a hiatus, and runners who are pushing their pace or distance.

A few quick tips for minimizing soreness:



1. Eat protein after your run or workout, ideally within 60 minutes of finishing is recommended — 10 to 20 grams for females, 30 to 40 grams for men. Our body uses amino acids from protein to repair muscle damage.



2. Warm up before your runs and stretch after them. Runners are prone to developing tight hamstrings, calves, and quadriceps, so you should always warm up before your run and stretch out afterward. Hint: There are warm-up routines in the Training section!



3. Avoid doing too much too fast. Once you get into a rhythm with race training, it can be tempting to jump ahead and take on more—but that can cause you some serious soreness. Our training plans are designed to meet you where you are in your running journey and build your strength, endurance, and stamina enough to run a half marathon.

As for fatigue and exhaustion, these are clear signs from your body that you need to slow down or take a break. Fatigue is less extreme than exhaustion, and can be remedied by easing up on your running routine (read: slowing down, shortening your run, etc.), or replacing a run with a cross-training session. Exhaustion, though, implies that your body has depleted its reserves and something is missing: the basic nutrition, hydration, or strength to complete your workout. To deal with exhaustion, consider hydrating, eating well-balanced, nutritious meals, and giving your body what it needs, whether that's a good stretch, sleep, or a light recovery walk. Whatever you do, don't ignore your body's signals. Resting and recovering now will help you remain healthy throughout your training and help you have effective and successful workouts once you return to your plan.

Common injuries + what to do if they happen

The majority of running injuries occur from the waist down—think feet, legs, and hips—and are either muscular or skeletal. Overtraining is a common cause, but other factors like having unsupportive running shoes, running on different surfaces, and having overly tight muscles can lead to injuries, too.

Below, we outline eight of the most common running injuries and great ways to avoid them.

Shin splints

What it is

Runners with shin splints will feel a splintering pain down the front of one or both shin bones. This injury is often due to overtraining, but shin splints can also develop in runners who frequently run on different surfaces.

How to avoid it

In addition to increasing your mileage gradually, try to run on similar surfaces as much as possible. Running on concrete, for example, is much harder on the body than, say, running on grass or astroturf. If you're frequently switching from concrete to grass, to treadmill, to hard-packed dirt, and so on, you could be at risk for shin splints. Otherwise, make sure you're resting between runs and have a supportive pair of running shoes.

Plantar fasciitis

What it is

If you're suffering from incessant pain on the bottom of your foot near your heel, you could have plantar fasciitis. This condition has a number of possible causes and can go away on its own, but for some, it can last months without treatment. That said, it's never

a bad idea to see a physical therapist or orthopedic doctor for medical advice (which we would recommend for any of these injuries).

How to avoid it

Wearing adequate running shoes and stretching your hip flexors, calves, and hamstrings before and after your runs can help keep plantar fasciitis at bay. Runners with high arches or flat feet should also consider getting orthotics for added support.

Stress fracture

What it is

Stress fractures are another type of overuse injury and are caused by repetitive stress on our bones. By definition, stress fractures are tiny cracks in a bone that results from repeated force or loading, and they usually occur when a part of the body is overstressed and overloaded before proper strength and training adjustments have been made. Stress fractures are serious, painful injuries, and can take two months or more to heal, depending on severity.

How to avoid it

Easing your way into running and progressing your mileage and speed over time will decrease your risk of getting injured, including stress fractures. Also, you should be replacing your running shoes every 500 to 800 kilometers, or every four to six months, depending on how often you run.

Runner's knee

What it is

The term “[runner's knee](#)” has come to represent any pain around the front of the kneecap. This includes pain felt when walking, running, doing squats, or going down a set of stairs. Runner's knee tends to be an overuse injury, but can also come from foot problems like flat feet or weak quadriceps.

How to avoid it

Avoiding hard surfaces like concrete, wearing not-too-old running shoes with enough support, and keeping your thigh muscles strong are a few ways to prevent runner's knee. If you suspect you're already dealing with it, an effective course of action is to consistently stretch and strengthen your hamstrings, glutes, and quadriceps.

Iliotibial (IT) Band Syndrome

What it is

IT Band Syndrome is another overuse injury common in long-distance runners. Symptoms include intense pain on the outside of the knee, which is caused by the repetitive bending and straightening of the knee during activities like running and biking.

How to avoid it

IT Band Syndrome often arises when there is a weakness instability elsewhere in the body, so keeping your other muscles, like your hip muscles, strong is key for preventing it. Warming up before your runs, easing into your training plan, keeping your muscles stretched and limber, and regularly replacing your running shoes will also ward off ITBS.

Mild sprained ankle

What it is

A sprained ankle occurs when one or more of the ligaments surrounding the ankle joint are stretched or torn. Some sprains are severe—meaning a ligament is torn or ruptured—while others are relatively minor and result in mild pain and swelling.

How to avoid it

In addition to warming up before runs, wearing supportive shoes, and slowly progressing in your training, you can avoid spraining your ankle by strengthening the muscles and tendons in your lower body—specifically your ankles, feet, calves, and quadriceps. Practicing single-leg balancing exercises and writing the ABCs in the air with your foot while seated will improve your ankle stability and reduce your risk of an ankle injury.

Hamstring strain

What it is

Hamstring strains tend to happen when a runner is overstriding or sprinting too hard without having warmed up. This overload on the hamstring can cause it to tear, leaving you with a sharp pain that makes running (and sometimes even walking) difficult. Most strains are mild but can worsen if not cared for.

How to avoid it

Getting a solid warm-up before your run primes your muscles for the work you're about to do, thereby decreasing your chances of a hamstring strain. Also, lightly stretching and foam rolling after your run will alleviate any built-up tightness in your hamstring and promote much-needed blood flow to help heal any injured tissue.

Hip pain

What it is

Hip pain is often caused by limitations in either strength or mobility of the hip—and it can be felt at the front, side, or back of the hip. Sometimes hip pain presents as a dull ache or a clicking/popping sensation, and other times it's more of soreness or tightness.

How to avoid it

There are a million reasons why your hip can hurt, so it's crucial to take multiple precautions when trying to refrain from injuring it. Many runners have tight hip muscles, so it's wise to do stretches like a figure-four stretch, knee to chest stretch, and kneeling lunge stretch to loosen your hip flexors, hip extensors, and hip rotators. Similarly, strengthening your hips will lessen your chance of hip pain, and for that, we recommend doing clamshells, side-lying abduction, lateral and monster walking, or single-leg stability drills.

The bottom line is whenever you feel pain—in your foot, your leg, your hip, anywhere—take a step back and try to assess what's wrong. If the pain goes beyond soreness, you could be injured or on the brink of an injury, and it's a good idea to pause your training, rest, and see a doctor. No one wants to spend time and energy training for a race, only to be sidelined by an injury they could have sidestepped.

What to do if you miss a run or your schedule changes

Regardless of the fact that you signed up for a race, you're still a human being, with a schedule, conflicts, commitments, and limited energy. Even very fit, dedicated runners sometimes have to skip a training run or fit it in at another time. Which is to say: It's okay, it happens.

In the event that you miss a run during your training, it's a good idea to skip it and continue with your plan as written. Obviously, you don't want to skip training runs left and right (if that happens, it's a sign that you should review your schedule and see how you can adjust), but missing one run will not invalidate your training. Stick to the plan as closely as you can, increase your mileage slowly,

and take your recovery seriously. If you can do that, you'll be ready on race day.

Also, many races allow you to upgrade or downgrade distances based on how your training is going, check their policies and timelines in case you need to make a change.



For more on injuries and fitting runs into your schedule, check out these articles on our Runkeeper blog:

- [How To Stay In Shape And Avoid Injury](#)
- [How To Avoid Common Running Injuries](#)

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Nutrition

If there's one universal truth in this world, it's that everyone loves to eat. And like most activities, running requires energy, which means we need fuel for it—aka we have to eat!

Learning to “eat like a runner” is a crucial part of the race training journey and a truly enjoyable part at that! In this section, you’ll glean valuable advice from Runkeeper nutrition expert Cara Schrager, MPH, RD, LDN, CDE, and master the art of race training nutrition.



CARA SCHRAGER

Registered Dietician &
Avid Runner

A brief introduction to nutrition for half marathon runners

Running is a sport that uses a significant amount of energy. Since we store energy in limited amounts, we need to fuel our bodies with macronutrients—for runners, primarily carbohydrates, but fats and proteins as well. Nutrition is important for runners because not only does it provide our bodies with fuel for each stride, but helps to repair any damage that may occur.

Note: If you've run a full marathon before, your nutrition should look very similar to how it did during marathon training. There isn't much of a difference between a half marathon and a marathon in terms of what to eat—it's mainly about quantity. You'll need fewer carbohydrates and calories during half marathon training and before the race itself than you would for a marathon, but other than that, the concepts and nutrients we'll discuss here hold true for both races.



Why nutrition is a major part of marathon training

In order for your body to endure marathon training, it's crucial that you take in adequate fuel through proper nutrition. You need extra calories to meet the increase in calories burned, and you need the majority of those calories to come from carbohydrates to replenish lost glycogen stores.

In addition to carbohydrates, it's important to choose nutritious foods that contain important nutrients like **iron** (like meats and beans), **calcium** (dairy products), **omega 3 fatty acids** (like salmon and walnuts) and **antioxidants** (colourful fruits and vegetables) to aid in repair and resynthesis of skeletal muscle and oxidative stress that occurs with distance running.

Without fuelling properly, one may experience fatigue and lack of energy during training runs, which can lead to poor performance on race day. The more energy you have during training, the more effective your workouts and training runs will be. Some runners will come across issues like headaches (lack of sodium) or cramping (lack of potassium). These issues can be resolved through proper nutrition—aka eating a well balanced diet and consuming extra fuel during long training runs, like electrolyte beverages or energy chews.



How your diet and nutrition should change during half marathon training

To achieve half marathon race goals your diet primarily needs adequate amounts of calories and carbohydrates in order to keep up with the body's energy demands. Long distances like the half marathon require long training runs that are anywhere from 12 to 18 kilometres at a time, which demands a lot of energy and can cause stress on the body that requires healing through anti-inflammatory and antioxidant rich foods. Therefore, your diet needs to change in the following ways:

1. You should be gradually increasing your calorie intake as you increase your weekly mileage through nutrient dense foods like whole grains, nuts and nut butters, avocados and colourful fruits and vegetables.
2. The timing of your meals and snacks may also change, as you will want to re-fuel within 30 to 45 minutes after a run to promote glycogen replenishment and muscle protein synthesis after a long run or intense workout.

How to eat throughout your race training

What to eat before your training runs

Whether you're a new or seasoned runner, training for a race will always require fuel! Before training runs, you should primarily eat carbohydrate-dense foods. Carbohydrates are macronutrients, and when we digest them, they get converted to glucose (blood sugar). Glucose feeds our cells and gives us energy for our runs!

Carbohydrates are found in grains, fruits, milk products, beans, and starchy vegetables like peas, corn, and potatoes. Even though all carbohydrates eventually get converted into glucose in our body, not all carbohydrates act the same way in the body. Before your runs, you should aim to eat the types of carbohydrates that are easy and quick to digest—like bread, plain bagels, oatmeal, and bananas.

Some examples of pre-run fuel for a short run (less than 30 minutes) could be...

- A banana
- A granola bar

And for longer runs...

- 1 cup cooked quick oats with a banana and 2 teaspoons of nut butter
- 1 bagel or 2 slices of toast with a thin spread of nut butter and jam
- 1 bagel with a thin spread of cream cheese
- *Also, experiment with different fuels such as gels, gummies, or salted pretzels during the long run itself. That way on race day, you know if these extra nibbles of fuel help or hurt your performance

Nutrition is very individualized, so with practice and training, you'll find out the right amount of pre-run fuel for you.

Foods to avoid before training runs

Before a run, you should avoid foods that take longer to digest like fats, proteins, and high fibre carbohydrates. Otherwise, you may end up with stomach cramping, bloating, or discomfort during your run. Vegetables, nuts and seeds, and beans are all high fibre foods, and thus should be avoided pre-run. Other foods to avoid include high-fat foods like fatty meats, cheeses, nut butter (in large quantities), and avocados. Protein-packed foods like eggs, meat, and dairy should be avoided before a run, as these also take longer to digest when eaten in large quantities, so they won't provide enough energy for immediate fuel.



How *much* you eat before a run depends on your body size and the length or amount of time you will spend running. For example, you will want to eat more carbohydrates before a long run as compared to a short run, which only requires a snack. Ideally, you should eat about an hour to two hours before a run to let your body properly digest the food you consumed. If you aren't able to allot that much time, drink 8 to 16 ounces of liquid carbohydrates like a sports drink or juice in the time you do have, up to 15 minutes prior to the race.

What to eat after your training runs

Eating after a run is important for several reasons—namely because eating helps replenish your lost glycogen stores and repair muscle damage. It has been shown that eating a 3:1 ratio of carbs to protein is effective for optimal recovery, in addition to eating within a window of 30 to 45 minutes after a run. For convenience, you can time your runs around breakfast, lunch, or dinnertime so you can recover with a meal, but if that doesn't work with your schedule, just plan to have a snack.



One example of a suitable post-run snack is chocolate milk, which provides the optimal ratio of carbohydrates to protein. Because it's a liquid, it doesn't take long to digest, meaning it can aid in a speedy recovery. A larger post-run snack example may be a vanilla greek yogurt with berries, 1 TBSP chia seeds or walnuts, and ¼ cup granola.

Other examples of post-run nutrition:

- A smoothie with greek yogurt, frozen fruit, and ground flaxseed
- 2 slices of whole wheat toast with avocado and scrambled eggs, plus 1 cup of fruit
- 12 ounces of chocolate milk and a date/nut bar

The amount you should eat after a run will depend on the length of your run. All in all, you want a balanced meal that provides carbohydrates and nutrients for healing, like omega 3s in walnuts or fatty fish, antioxidants in fruit and vegetables, and iron in beans and meats. Try not to eat foods that further increase inflammation, like fried or highly processed foods—but now and then, order your meal of choice and enjoy it!

What to eat in general while training

In general, runners should be mindful of their nutrition throughout training. It's important to eat a variety of foods—that way, you can make sure you're getting the nutrients you need. Try to “eat the rainbow” by choosing colourful fruits and vegetables and incorporating them throughout the day. Pair those with lean proteins like seafood, skinless poultry, and lean cuts of meat in addition to plant-based proteins like beans and legumes. Most importantly, aim to eat a variety of carbohydrates within each carb category: whole grains, legumes, fruits, vegetables, and dairy. Training is a great opportunity to see how certain foods impact your energy levels, performance, and recovery as a runner, and help you know what your stomach will tolerate on race day.



Feature image via
[Trang Doan](#)

Between your runs, aim to include a protein source at every meal. This will help you maintain satiety (read: not be hungry all the time) and help your body rebuild your muscles. As you increase your mileage during training, you'll inevitably start to get hungrier after runs. Eating protein with meals will ensure that you are satisfied after a meal and don't overeat.

When you're not running, strive to eat a variety of high fibre carbohydrates like whole grains, fruit, and vegetables (just not right before a run!). Try to limit highly processed foods, high sodium foods, and foods high in saturated fats. These foods can increase inflammation and provide zero nutritional benefits.

What to eat on race day (and the night before)

What to eat the day and night before the race

The night before a race should include a meal that has been tried and true. Nothing new! Your meal should definitely include carbohydrates like rice, pasta, bread, or potatoes. That said, be careful not to overdo the quantity of food—you don't want to go to bed feeling uncomfortably full.

Also, you don't necessarily need to "carb-load" the night before a half marathon. Contrary to popular belief, carb-loading tends to happen naturally during half marathon training. Towards the end of your training plan, you'll run less mileage and eat the same amount of carbohydrates, so your body will store those carbs as glycogen. Still, it's worth being mindful of the types of carbohydrates you choose during this time and aim for unprocessed whole foods sources like whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, and milk products rather than excessive amounts of sweets, baked goods, and highly processed carbohydrates.

Another note: Make sure to stay hydrated by drinking a lot of water in the days leading up to the race. However, the evening before the race, avoid drinking excessive amounts of water—going to the bathroom multiple times during the night will disrupt your sleep. Aim to avoid alcohol before the race, too, as it could increase your risk of dehydration.



What to eat the day of your race

For any race, it's recommended to eat about 2 hours before the race to allow yourself enough time to properly digest the meal. Ideally, you want to eat at least 60 to 75 grams of carbohydrates before your half marathon. For reference, a bagel with a few teaspoons of peanut butter will give you about 60 grams. To up that number, you can add some fruit or jam.

Plan to eat a breakfast with easily digestible carbohydrates like a bagel, english muffin, or two pieces of toast with a light spread of peanut butter and jelly, honey, or cream cheese, and a piece of fruit like an orange or banana.



Some examples of what you can eat before running your half marathon...

- A bagel with peanut butter and a sliced banana
- 1.5 cups of oatmeal with 1 tbsp brown sugar and a banana
- An energy bar and a banana
- A peanut butter and jelly sandwich, plus a granola bar

Lastly, a quick reminder: Don't forget to pack your energy chews, goos, or any energy snack/supplement that you had success with during training. Then, just sip on water before your race, and stop to hydrate at water stations during the race if you need it!



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Motivation

Motivation tips

- **Start by setting a solid goal.** Find your “why” and refer back to it when you feel unmotivated.
- **Take time to self-reflect.** Look inward and think through what motivates you most, whether that’s competition, community, or something else entirely.
- **Focus on developing good running habits.** Motivation is fleeting—but habits, when practiced and solidified, can help you make the most of any training program, no matter how you feel.
- **Find an easy way to stay accountable.** Grab a journal or download the Runkeeper app, knock out your runs, and celebrate small wins throughout your training.
- **Don’t go at it alone!** Find a running buddy or accountability partner (possibly someone with similar goals) you can count on when your motivation is low.

Now that you’re prepared to pick clothes, train, and eat, it’s time to talk about how to stay motivated. Regardless of your experience level as a runner, there will always be moments when you don’t feel like running, or when you want to give up altogether. Those feelings are normal, and they aren’t signs that you should throw in the towel. Rather, they’re a sign that you need reinforcements.

Here’s our advice for sustaining motivation throughout race training.

Start by setting a solid goal.

Runkeeper coaches agree that staying motivated is much easier when you have a clear “why.” You have to get clear on what the real intention behind your race training is. When you’re in the thick of those hard, long runs and workouts, you have to remind yourself of your “why.” Why do you run? What’s waiting for you at the finish line?

Once you have your “why,” write it down and keep it handy or share it with a friend. This will provide you with reassurance and a surge of motivation when you need it during tough training stretches. When you establish your reasons for why you’re training and why you want to run this race, they can serve as a safety net to fall back on when your motivation starts to wane.

FOR MORE ON SETTING GOALS, HEAD TO THE GOALS SECTION OF THIS GUIDE!



Take time to self-reflect.

Part of figuring out how to stay motivated is recognizing what motivates you in the first place. To do that, we have to turn inward and figure out what challenges us. Are you motivated by competition or camaraderie? Both? Answers to questions like these can give us guidance on how to go about training.

For example, if you thrive when you’re surrounded by other people, join a local running group, find a running partner, or try an indoor running class! If you’re motivated by small wins, set weekly goals for time or distance. Each of us are motivated by different factors, and doing some introspection can help clarify how you should train.

Practice using your “why”—and if it’s not strong enough, change it.

Running a half marathon takes determination and commitment—and 21.1 kilometres is not a short distance. You’re going to spend anywhere from 3 to 4 months training for this race, and you’re going to face obstacles along the way.

A lot can happen in 3 to 4 months—the weather can change, your situation or circumstances might change, and your motivation levels will inevitably fluctuate. There will be times when you have to run in inclement weather, and there will be times when you second guess yourself and think: Why am I doing this? That’s where your “why” comes in (again).

Your reason for running a half marathon has to be strong enough to get you out the door on the good days and the bad days. If you find yourself skipping training runs or feeling like you want to throw in the towel, think about your “why,” and see if it holds up. If it doesn’t, you have to find a new one.

Focus on developing habits—they’re more powerful than motivation alone.

This next pro tip comes from Coach Alain, and it’s more of a mindset shift: *Develop good running habits and don’t rely on motivation.* Motivation is a feeling, while a habit is a repeated action. It’s easier to carry out an action (especially an action that you get used to doing, as a habit) than it is to force yourself to feel a certain way (in this case, motivated). It’s a small mindset shift, but the results can be quite powerful. Instead of relying on always feeling



a certain way—which is practically impossible—work on turning running into a habit, and practice that habit over and over again.

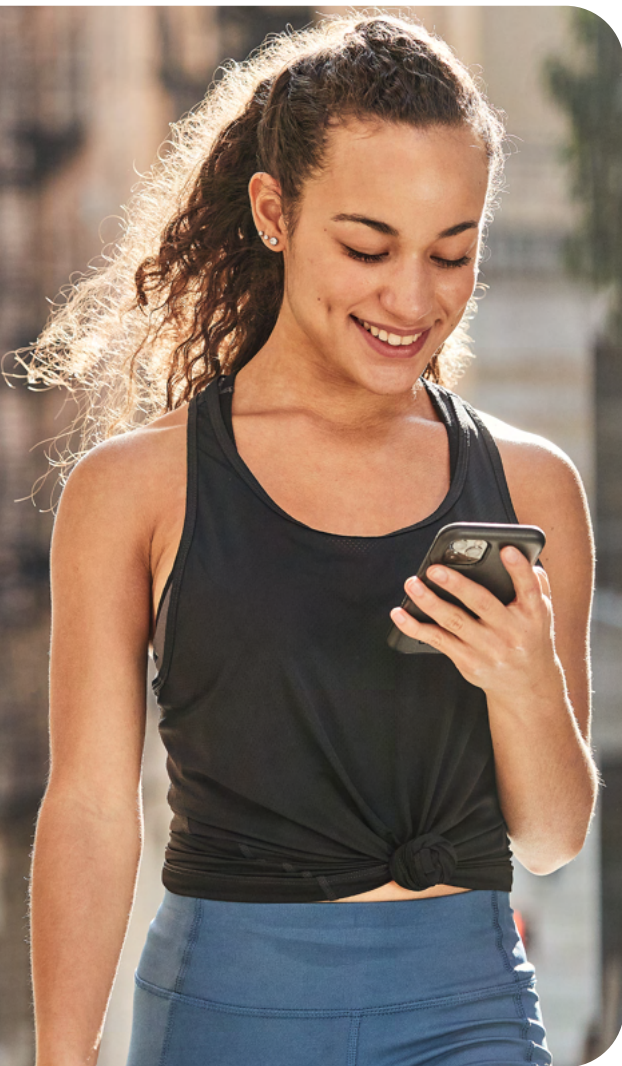
Find an easy way to stay accountable.

In our lives, we have multiple external sources of accountability—we're accountable to our bosses, coaches, family, you name it. But race training requires you to hold yourself accountable, and for some people, self-accountability is difficult. That's why many runners typically like to have both a training plan (so they know what's expected of them) and a way to log their runs (to check them off their list and track progress).

Most importantly, your accountability system has to be sustainable.

You want something quick and easy, like a journal or a running app (the [Runkeeper app](#) tracks your distance, time, and route, and has a space to take notes and log your mood). Finding a way to hold yourself accountable will inevitably make your training go more smoothly, in doing so, help you stay motivated.





Don't go at it alone!

At times, training can feel tough and draining, so it pays to have a support system. Finding a running buddy, accountability partner, or simply someone to text after you complete a run can make the training experience more gratifying (and again, hold you accountable). On the [Runkeeper app](#), you can find and add friends you can share your runs and accomplishments with—so even if you're not together, you can support each other!

Whether you're running a short or long-distance race, looping other people into your training is a great way to boost your motivation. If you can find someone whose goals are similar to yours, that's even better! You can make plans to run with that person and push each other to get out the door on days when it's hard to self-motivate.

The takeaway

Training for a race is a journey—it's a challenging, fulfilling, and worthwhile experience that will teach you quite a lot about yourself if you see it through. In the event that your motivation dwindles during your training, we encourage you to come back to these expert tips and remind yourself that it's part of the process. No one is motivated 24/7, but with the right tools and mindset, nothing can stop you!

Race

Finally, race day is on the horizon! You're coming up on the end of your training plan, and you're wondering what else you can do to prepare for your race. Well, you've come to the right place.

How you prepare your mind and treat your body in the days leading up to the race can be the difference between feeling confident or feeling unprepared. To help, we've outlined what the week before your race, the day before your race, and the day of your race should look like.

The week leading up to your race

By now, your training plan should be complete (or near-complete), and your focus should be on recovery, rest, and research.

But first, a word on tapering.

The importance of tapering before a race

Half marathon training programs require a great deal of time—usually 12 weeks—and by the end, you'll have clocked in a serious amount of mileage. That's why, in the last few weeks of your training, your plan will tell you to do shorter runs. This is called a “taper”—meaning you taper off your distance to help your body recover.

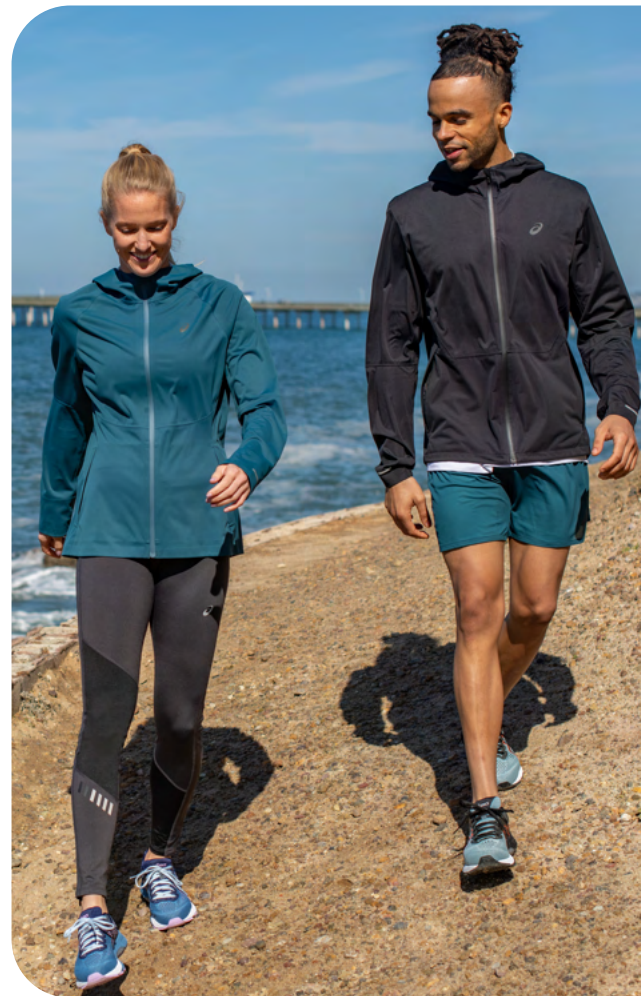
You may be tempted to ignore the taper (thinking that the more you run, the more prepared you'll be), but we strongly recommend not going down that path. Throughout your training program, you've been increasing your mileage and your body has gone through a process of adapting to the weight of that workload. Plus, you've trained your energy systems to

function well for your specific race distance. In other words, there isn't anything more that you can do to improve your fitness level once you're in the taper window—but there's plenty you can do to waste all the work you put in, like get injured or max out your energy. At this point, the work is done, and now it's time to let your legs and body relax before the big day.

Recovery

Hopefully, you've been putting in the work to recover between your runs, and whatever's been working for you—foam rolling, self-massage, hot or cold baths—you should continue doing in the week leading up to your race. Your last few training runs will likely be shorter than the actual race distance, and the goal of those should be to take it easy. You want your body to recover properly, and to do that, you have to give it a break.

**Note: Part of recovery includes [staying hydrated](#). How much water you need will vary by individual and fluctuate depending on sweat levels. Most importantly, listen to your body, and make sure your pee is pale yellow. (Yes, pee is still an optimal indicator.)*





Rest

Sleep is always important, but it's especially crucial that you get quality sleep on the nights leading up to your race. It's natural to feel anxious or excited about the race, but you don't want that to interfere with your sleep schedule. So as race day approaches, take a little extra time at night to stretch, get comfortable, and wind down by reading or meditating (skip the electronics, if possible or park them in another room to charge). You'll be grateful when you feel well-rested and ready to go.

Research

We would also recommend doing some research prior to the race and solidifying your day-of plans. Try to think of ways you can make your life easier on race day, and do those tasks ahead of time. Make a checklist, like this one below, and knock out these to-dos one by one.

Familiarize yourself with the course, noting where the uphill and downhill are so you can mentally prepare for them (if it's a virtual race, plan your route).

Learn where water stations and restrooms are, in case you need them.

Double-check that the clothes you want to wear for the race are clean and set aside (and train with them a few times to be sure they don't cause any chafing).

Triple check the weather and make any necessary adjustments to your outfit (layers are always a good idea).

Fill your car with gas if you're planning to drive to the race start, allow time for parking, or arrange for someone to drop you off (either way, figure out how much time you need).

Attach your bib to the front of your shirt, if you're given one.

Download your running playlist, podcast, or audiobook to your phone, if you run with sound. You might have trouble getting cell service when you're standing in a flock of people, so don't rely on data!

Complete any sort of small task that will save you time and undue stress on race day .

The day and night before your race

The day and night before your race is for preparing yourself mentally and physically, and walking through your plan one last time.

What to eat

Eat as you normally would throughout the day—nothing new or surprising, see our Nutrition section for more—and at night, stick to a meal that's tried and true and contains carbohydrates. Pasta, rice, bread, or potatoes are solid options, but there's no need to go overboard on quantity or “carb-load”. Going to bed uncomfortably full can wreak havoc on your sleep, so make sure to only eat until you're full, and then stop.

Runners often wonder if they should “carb-load” for a half marathon. It’s a bit ironic because carb-loading often occurs naturally for half marathoners by way of tapering for the race. As you run less mileage throughout the weeks leading up to the race and eat the same amount of carbohydrates, you’re more likely to store those carbs as glycogen in your muscles. In other words, no need to stuff yourself with carbohydrates. Avoid overeating, and steer clear of alcohol—it increases your risk of dehydration.

How to prepare

Whatever you do, don’t forget to lay out your race outfit and gear the night before your race. This includes your clothes, shoes, water, headphones, headband, breakfast, race bib, safety pins, anything you might need. You don’t want to be scrambling in the morning and risk forgetting something essential. Once you make sure everything is in place for your AM routine, you can start to wind down, chill out, or distract yourself—whatever makes you feel at ease.

How to deal with pre-race nerves

The night before a race can be an anxiety-provoking time for many runners. Your training is coming to a head, and you may feel nervous now that the big day is here. This is to be expected, but taking steps to reduce your pre-race jitters—like keeping your thoughts positive, and interrupting intrusive thoughts—will go a long way in helping you get the mental and physical rest you need. Meditation and mindfulness (like practicing visualization exercises and basic meditation) can also help you achieve a sound mind before exciting and potentially stressful situations, such as race day.

And if you need more reassurance, remind yourself that you're feeling anxious because you care about your performance and this race has meaning for you. So as much as you can, try to embrace it! Channel your nerves into excitement, and tell yourself over and over that you can do this (because you can!).



The day of your race

Thanks to your stellar preparation, the morning of your race will, in theory, be smooth and methodical. That said, make sure you give yourself plenty of time. Wake up early so you can avoid rushing and panicking—and that way if something goes wrong (you didn't charge your phone, your socks aren't dry, etc.), you can fix it or find an alternative. Plan to arrive at the race location at least one hour ahead of start time so you can warm up and avoid long bathroom lines.

What to eat

What you should eat before your race depends on your preferences and what your body can tolerate. Before any run, you want to avoid excessive amounts of fat, protein, and fiber, as they're harder to digest and can cause stomach issues, like bloating and cramping, during your race. It's a good idea to play it safe and eat something you've eaten before a run with no discomfort.

Generally speaking, you should aim to eat at least 60 to 75 grams of carbohydrates before a half marathon. For example, a bagel with a light spread of peanut butter will provide about 60 grams of carbohydrates. Optional add-ons could be jam on the bagel or a piece of fruit. (Whatever fuel you ate prior to your longest training run would also suffice.)

The moments before your race & during it

Once you arrive at your race location (seriously, get there early), your goals should be to warm up, use the bathroom, and stay calm and relaxed. You have put in the work to get yourself to this point, and you can reassure yourself that you've done everything you can. Now it's time to run.

How to warm up

To warm up, you can go for a short jog, run a few striders (short sprints to wake up your body), and do some dynamic stretches like high knees, lunges, leg swings, or squats. You want to get your blood pumping and muscles warm. You can stretch anything that feels tight, too, like your calves, quads, and hamstrings.

How to deal with pre-race jitters (again)

Still feeling anxious? It happens, and it's okay. Remind yourself of the work you put in throughout your training, and think back to the times when your training went well and you were proud of yourself. Take deep breaths. As Dr. Justin Ross, Runkeeper coach and clinical psychologist puts it: Trust is the greatest antidote to anxiety that we have, in both sport and life. Trust yourself because you trained, because you're an athlete and because you've overcome challenges in running and in your life.

How to deal with nerves *during* the race

It's possible that at various times throughout the race, you will start to doubt yourself and your ability to finish. If that happens, drown out those negative thoughts by repeating positive ones. You can do this. One kilometre at a time. You are capable and strong, and you deserve to see this through. Repeat those words, focus on slowing down your breathing, and your mind will be back in the race in no time.



After your race

No matter what happened during your race—whether it went as planned or not—you should cross that finish line with a smile on your face and pride in your heart. You earned that moment, that post-race high, and you're entitled to ride that euphoric feeling out as long as you can. Pat yourself on the back and congratulate other runners. You just conquered a major feat!

Once you cross the finish line and make your way out of the course, find a place to stretch. Water bottles, snacks, and towels are usually given out at the end of races, and you should take all of them because you'll need them. Right away, start drinking water to replace all the fluid you sweat out during the race. It's also wise to have a snack with protein and carbohydrates, to refill your glycogen stores and kickstart your muscle recovery. Finally, take a few minutes to do some static stretching. Touch your toes, stretch your hamstrings, do a few quad pulls, whatever feels good.

AFTER THAT, IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE.



Celebration

Congratulations! You made it to the finish line. We hope you're feeling accomplished and on top of the world because you deserve nothing less.

Now that the race is over, you may be thinking to yourself...what now? Don't worry, we'll walk you through how to recover and of course, how to celebrate!

What to do after you run a race

Chances are after you run a race, you're going to be tired. The hard work you put in has come to a close, and you may feel a bit of mental and physical exhaustion sink in. That's why, for at least 3 days after your race, you should take a break from running. Trust us, your mind and body will thank you.

How to jumpstart recovery after your half marathon



1. Eat protein: Immediately following the race, try to have a protein-rich meal or supplement, which will kickstart the muscle repair process.



2. Sleep it off: Then, settle in for a long, luxurious night of sleep. Don't set an alarm—sleep as much as you need.



3. Get moving: The next day, as much as you may not want to, you should move your body a bit. Getting blood circulating into your legs will aid in your recovery, as well as decrease long-term soreness. A brisk walk will do.



4. Assess your body: Did anything hurt during the race, and does it still hurt now? Take inventory of your body, and treat any muscle pain or soreness with ice and/or anti-inflammatories.

Other than that, the choice is yours regarding how to proceed. When your body feels better, you could take a few active recovery days where you engage in another form of exercise, like cycling, stretching, or yoga. You could also just take extra days to rest and go for a few walks. Each runner's body will require a different amount of recovery time, so it's up to you to decide how long of a break you take, and what the days following that break look like.

A word to the wise, though: Don't jump back into running before your body is ready. You have to remember that you spent weeks training for your race, and you put your body through a lot during that time. Running will always be there; there's no real rush to start up again. Take time to let this achievement sink in—it will help you avoid burnout in the long-term.

What to eat after your half marathon

Immediately after your race, you want to have something that replenishes your glycogen stores and contains protein to rebuild your muscles. Pair an electrolyte beverage with a glass of chocolate milk, a fruit smoothie, or even a turkey sandwich with potato chips!



Feature image via [Nathan Dumlao](#)

In the hours following your race, you should enjoy any celebratory meal that you want! Runkeeper nutrition expert Cara Schrager, MPH, RD, LDN, CDE, loves having pasta with meat sauce (or seafood) and vegetables, or a turkey or beef burger with a side of potatoes or pasta salad—but anything with protein, carbs, and veggies will do!

How to learn from your race

No matter what the outcome of your race is, there is always something you can learn and take with you for future races. Think about what went well during your race and what you wish had gone better.

Questions to ask yourself after your race:

- Did you cramp up at all?
- Did you need water at any point?
- Were certain kilometres harder than others, physically or mentally?
- Did anything not go as planned?

Questions like these can give you insight into your strengths and weaknesses, and inform your training going forward.

Even if you see your race as having gone poorly, it's still worth reflecting on it. You'll come away with better knowledge of yourself, your capabilities, and where you have room to improve.

How to celebrate!

Every runner celebrates completing a race in their own unique way—and you should celebrate in whatever way you see fit!

Many runners like to celebrate with a delicious meal and surround themselves with loved ones and fellow runners. We asked our Runkeeper coaches what their post-race traditions are (some of which are more, let's say, unique than others).

Here's how they celebrate after finishing a race:



Burgers & buddies

My 3 B's of a post-race celebration are beers, burgers, and buddies! There's nothing better than getting together to celebrate the accumulation of weeks and months of training in the pursuit of crossing another finish line. The post-race celebration is a ritual for runners, and provides a great time to connect with your running community and reflect on everything that went into your training.

BY JUSTIN ROSS

Runkeeper Coach

Get some sleep

Does sleep count? Yeah, that's where it's at. My bed and I rekindle the lost romance from early mornings and late nights.

ALAIN SAINT-DIC

Runkeeper Coach



Head to Brunch

Regardless of the race outcome, I celebrate by having a satisfying brunch with my friends and family, and I thank myself for putting in the training and hard work to complete the race. I also usually toast with a nice mimosa!

CORINNE FITZGERALD

Runkeeper Coach



Dinner & an early night

I pretty much always head to the nearest pub and order a cold beer. Once I have had a shower and had a debrief of the race in my mind and with my coach, I usually go somewhere nice for dinner and then have an early night.

HOLLY RUSH

Runkeeper Coach

Shower & Socialize

Good food and chill vibes! Priority number one is a shower. Then I like to socialize for a little while, but I definitely require an early bedtime after a race!

JESS MOVOLD

Runkeeper Coach





Have a shoey

After I finish a race, there's always lots to celebrate! But, on the special days when I hit a PR, it's time for a SHOEY! What's a shoey you might ask? You take off your freshly warm shoe that carried you to the finish, fill it with a beer, and taste your victory...and sweat.

MATT MEYERS

Runkeeper Coach

Enjoy the euphoria

I can't say I have a bonafide post-race tradition, but depending on the race and conditions, the most enjoyable post-race memories for me are shared with friends over a simple meal soon after the race when the euphoria level is high.

YUSUF JEFFERS

Runkeeper Coach





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