



TRAINING for the MARATHON:

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Part 3: *PEAKING for the Marathon:*

'How to run at your best in your most important race'

Peaking training is the special type of training you should do in the final few weeks before a major goal race. It focuses your physiological and psychological responses to simultaneously attain their ultimate potential when you need it most. Peaking techniques adjust your training so that a new balance of intensity and recovery is achieved. They will help you arrive on race day in the best possible condition.

Peaking training is important for all levels of runners from beginners to elite. By making a few changes to your training routine you can improve your performance by as much as ten percent. It doesn't matter if you are running to finish, or to make the Olympic team, you need all the help you can get to conquer the challenge of the marathon

Periodisation

Periodisation is the training theory that is based on training differently depending on the time of year and how close it is to your major goal race. It involves cycles of hard training followed by racing and then easy training. Peaking training is a key factor in periodisation.

The Lag Theory

It takes three weeks before you get the benefit of any training you have done. This means that any hard training you do in the last three weeks before a marathon will detract from your performance rather than enhance it because you will still be recovering. A Progressive Program of Adaptation is what a training plan is about in the long term. When peaking you try to jump over a performance level for a temporary period in order to achieve an ultimate performance. You will not lose your fitness by training less in the last few weeks, but you can get better prepared to race.

Tapering

Tapering is the decrease of total mileage before a major race. This facilitates recovery from the high mileage training you have done during the base and preparation phases. By race day your physical reserves will then be at their peak level.

Recovery

The role of recovery should not be underestimated. Sometimes it is the runners who get sick or injured with three weeks to go who run the best. This is

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40 High Street, Toowong, 4066, Brisbane, QLD, Australia
tel: 07 3371 7811 | fax: 07 3870 5687
e: shop@intraining.com.au | web: www.intraining.com.au



because they are the most recovered. It is vital that you get adequate rest in these last three weeks. Less mileage, fewer sessions each week, less quantity in speed sessions, more rest and less stress will help you feel refreshed and reinvigorated by race day.

Sharpening

The most important variable in peaking training is sharpening. By increasing intensity while decreasing quantity, sharpening is achieved. You will run much faster than you have done during all of the preparation but will feel much stronger. This is possible because you are recovering better from training. These sessions communicate to your body that an ultimate performance will soon be required. The faster running and greater strength you feel during sharpening gives you the confidence to really try for an ultimate performance.

PEAKING SESSIONS:

There are a few key sessions that are part of any peaking training program. They are different from the sessions that you have done previously and they share the same focus of the final goal of the marathon.

10km Predictor Race

This is usually your final leadup race. It should be done at the end of a recovery week but before you have begun peaking training. This race gives you a good prediction of what is a realistic goal for the marathon. Racing without a full taper and sharpening training you should still get some performance improvements after this race. But it will give you an accurate idea of your current fitness level.

The Last Long Run

One of the major mistakes people make is running a long run too close to the marathon. This does not give them adequate time to recover. This final long run should be three or four weeks before the marathon. It will often be the longest long run you will do in the whole training program. There is always a risk of running too hard in this final long run because you are so fit. Some people run a fantastic effort only to find that they can not reproduce it in the marathon.

Sunday sessions

The Sunday before the marathon should be an easy run of no more than 20km. It is a good idea to run the last few kilometres at close to race pace. The Sunday before this should be a slightly longer steady effort over similar terrain as you will encounter in the marathon.

Morning Runs

Your body has a daily rhythm of testosterone levels. The hormone that affects your sleep patterns controls this. One way of getting prepared to race is to wake up and run at the same time as the marathon will start. You should be able to

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adapt sufficiently by doing this in the final week before the marathon. It is also a good idea to slightly lift the pace of your recovery runs.

Power Session

Speed sessions are the vehicles through which peaking and sharpening is achieved. They help direct the training effort and control your confidence level. The Power Session is the most important part of any peaking program. It is a repetition session with fewer repetitions, complete recovery and much higher intensity than you have ever done. It is usually ten days before your goal race and is the last really hard run that you do before race day. A good session is 3 x 1km with a five minute recovery after the first repetition and an eight minute recovery after the second.

Pace Sessions

After the power session there are no more hard sessions. Instead you run sessions simulating the marathon. The best way to do this is to run time trials at marathon pace. You need to be able to get accurate splits and should visualise running the first few kilometres in the marathon.

Give yourself two days to recover from the power session then run a 10km Time Trial. Treat it like a race with a full warm-up and running paced right from the start.

The next pace session replaces the main weekly speed session. Warm-up with a few brisk repetitions before running a 3km time trial or 3 x 1km at marathon pace. The goal of these sessions is pacing not speed. Running too fast is worse than running too slow.

The final pace session is the Thursday before the marathon. It should be over similar terrain as the final few kilometres of the race. Run negative splits with the second half faster than the first but no faster than marathon race pace. Visualise yourself finishing strong in the marathon.

Running the day before

It is not a good idea to have a day off the day before the marathon. You should have a day off on the Friday instead. You should run an easy 3 to 5km with a few easy surges. If it is possible, run over the final few kilometres of the marathon to see what it is like. You want to be able to identify any tight muscles that need extra stretching and the run will help you to relax. You want your muscles to be fluid on the day and a day off will not achieve this.

PREPARING TO RACE:

Mental Preparation and Visualisation

Peaking is not just a physiological process. It is often more dependent on your mental ability than your physical readiness. Peaking requires that you focus on



your goal, control your arousal level and make mental preparations. Certain rituals you have will help you to get into that perfect aroused state.

It is good if you practice this state by doing visualisation in training before the race. Imagine yourself running strongly and smoothly in the marathon. While you want to avoid thinking negative thoughts it is a good idea to visualise yourself overcoming problems during the race. Picture yourself maintaining concentration even as things get tough. Practicing this will give you the confidence to bounce back from any problems on race day.

Work out the pace you want to run, and the splits you will need to achieve your goal time. Learn how to calculate the splits in your head so you will not be lost in confusion in the race.

You do not want to encounter anything new in the race itself: practice drinking while running or using carbohydrate drinks or gels; using your race shoes, socks and clothing; and running with others. If you are prepared mentally you will feel in control the whole way and run much better because of it.

Make a Checklist

Plan everything that you will need for the race. Pack everything and be ready the night before. It is important that you do not use up too much nervous energy too close to race time by a problem that could have been avoided by pre planning. There is nothing worse than turning up to the race without any shorts on under your tracksuit pants or two left feet.

EQUIPMENT: Checklist:

1. 2 pairs of shoes - the ones you will race in and a back-up pair;
2. 2 pairs of socks;
3. Shorts and underwear;
4. Singlet or a Shirt to race in;
5. Your watch with a cleared stopwatch memory;
6. Warm Clothes for before and after, and a towel;
7. Your race number, pins and the race information book;
8. Optional: Special Drinks, energy gels, Vaseline, a hat, and sunglasses.

Some More Pre-race Strategies

- Do not get hungry at any time in the last few days before the race. Make sure that you drink extra water during this time, as it will help prevent constipation and will also help the food you eat be converted to glycogen.



- Try to avoid any stresses during race week. This includes cross training, work, entertaining or family commitments. You will have plenty of time after the race to do the things you have sacrificed during the training period.
- Set your alarm and make sure that it is turned on.
- Follow your normal pre-race warm-up routine. Rituals can help you relax so you will not get overaroused.
- Make sure that you get enough sleep two nights before the race, the last night is often restless.
- Just before the start, focus on the task ahead and say something positive.

NUTRITION for the Marathon

Nutrition for the last week of the marathon is not that much different to what is required during marathon training. A healthy diet of foods high in carbohydrate and low in fats and simple sugars is what will keep your glycogen reserves up for race day.

Carbo-Loading

Carbohydrate loading is a theory that has lost most of its popularity in recent times. In its strict form it is three days of a high protein, low carbohydrate diet to deplete glycogen reserves; followed by a high carbohydrate diet the final few days before the marathon. This is designed to top up glycogen stores so that there is plenty of energy to make the distance. The depletion phase is too hard on some people and has been scientifically shown to have little added benefit to a trained person. The most common form of carbo-loading is now without the depletion and involves hydration and a high percentage of carbohydrates in the last two days. Carbohydrate loading is not bingeing. You should not be trying to stuff yourself silly.

The last Meal

Anything you eat in the last 24 hours before the race may not have passed through your digestive system by race time. For this reason it is best to switch to low-fibre foods. Do not eat anything exotic. Eat things that you like but avoid seafood or other foods that you may be allergic to. Again do not overeat but have an early dinner the night before with a substantial late supper. Some people like to have something on the morning but it may give you stomach problems in the race unless you wake up a few hours before the start. You probably need the rest more than the food, so just have a juice instead.

Water

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Dehydration is recognised as one of the main reasons for slowing down in the marathon. Some people try to force fluids down in the last few days to avoid dehydration. You should aim to be fully hydrated but not bloated. You will definitely run slower than you should if you have to keep stopping for the toilet.

EQUIPMENT and FOOTWEAR

New Shoes

The most frequent advice you will get about running a marathon is to make sure you are not wearing new shoes. While it is important that they are worn in, this can be easily accomplished in a few runs. The much greater risk and more common mistake is wearing shoes that are too old.

If you have run all of your training in a shoe it is almost certainly too old to wear in the marathon. A marathon is a supreme effort and you want to make sure that your equipment is up to the job. It is best to get a new pair for the marathon in the last month before the race and wear it sparingly. After about 100kms shoes will start to go downhill. If you want to run at the peak of your abilities wear shoes that are at their peak of performance too.

Clothing

Clothing can be the cause of much pain in the marathon. Chafing is a serious condition that can take weeks to recover if it gets infected. Run in your race clothes in a long run before the race. Include the same socks and underwear if you can. Vaseline and Band-Aids over the nipples can help but ideally you should try to find a clothing solution.

Your clothes should fit well but not be restrictive in any way. Split shorts are better and a singlet rather than T-shirt. The more skin exposed the better off you will be. Your socks are a much more likely cause of blisters than your shoes so get a new pair of anklets. Avoid natural fibres that lose their shape and get abrasive when wet. Go for Coolmax or Thorlo's.

Peaking training will help you achieve what you desire in the marathon but you must have done the hard training leading up to it. There is not much use tapering off nothing. If you follow this peaking plan you should feel better and run stronger on race day. More importantly peaking will give you the confidence that is needed to make it through the marathon. So good luck and see you at the start on 30 April.

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