Plan: your first half marathon

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Train for 16 weeks with four runs a week: two easy runs, one faster session and a long run. The long run grows by no more than about 10% at a time, every fourth week is easier, and the last three weeks are a taper (a planned cut in training before race day so you start fresh).

Why it matters: A half marathon (13.1 miles) often takes first-timers two hours or more. Building the long run slowly lowers injury risk (see "Running injuries"), and a proper taper helps you arrive rested (see "Tapering before a race").

Who it suits

- People who can already run 30 minutes without stopping, three times a week. If you can't yet, start with "Plan: your first 5K."
- Runners who have done a 5K or 10K and want a bigger goal.

What it costs

Item	Commitment
Running	4 sessions a week, 25 to 105 minutes
Strength	2 sessions a week, about 40 to 45 minutes; 1 during the taper
Total time	About 3.5 to 5.5 hours a week at the peak, including strength
Equipment	Running shoes; a watch or phone; gels or chews for long runs
Difficulty	Beginner to intermediate

How the sessions work

- **Easy:** you can talk in full sentences. Most of your running should feel like this (see "Endurance training basics").
- **Strides:** 4 to 6 short bursts of about 20 seconds at a quick, relaxed pace near the end of an easy run. Faster than your race pace, but not an all-out sprint, with full recovery between.
- **Intervals:** after 10 minutes easy, repeat 3 minutes hard (only a few words at a time) and 2 minutes easy, then 10 minutes easy.
- **Steady:** after 10 minutes easy, run at a "comfortably hard" pace you could hold for about an hour, then 10 minutes easy.
- **Race effort:** the pace you plan to hold in the race. Repeats come after 10 minutes easy, with 2 minutes easy between them and 10 minutes easy to finish.
- **Long run:** easy pace the whole way. Walking breaks are fine.
- **A sample week:** Monday strength, Tuesday faster session, Wednesday easy run, Thursday strength, Friday easy run, Saturday long run, Sunday rest.
- **Log each run** in the **cardio log** (Plan my workouts, then Today's workout, then Cardio). It totals your weekly miles and shows your longest run.

The 16-week plan

All times are in minutes and include warm-up and cool-down.

Week	Easy run 1	Faster session	Easy run 2	Long run
1	30	30 easy	30	45
2	30	30 easy with strides	30	50
3	35	35 easy with strides	30	55
4 (easier)	30	30 easy	25	45
5	35	Intervals, 4 rounds (40)	35	60
6	35	Steady 15 (35)	35	66
7	40	Intervals, 5 rounds (45)	35	72
8 (easier)	30	30 easy with strides	30	60
9	40	Steady 20 (40)	40	79
10	40	Intervals, 6 rounds (50)	40	86
11	45	Steady 25 (45)	40	94
12 (easier)	35	35 easy with strides	30	80
13 (peak)	45	3 × 8 min at race effort, 2 min easy between (48)	40	103
14 (taper)	35	2 × 8 min at race effort (38)	35	80
15 (taper)	30	2 × 5 min at race effort (32)	25	60
16 (race week)	35	35 easy with 3 × 5 min at race effort	25, two days before	Race

Check your progress: the long run never grows by more than about 10% over your longest run in the past month. Weeks 14 to 16 cut weekly running time to roughly 80%, 60% and 40% of week 13, before the race itself.

Repeat a week or skip a faster session if you're sore, tired or getting a niggle. Missing one week won't cost you the race (see "Missed a week? Getting back on track").

Strength, twice a week

Heavy lifting makes runners more efficient, and adding jumps helps most (see "Strength training for endurance athletes"). Strength work also lowers injury risk (see "Running injuries"). Plan my workouts puts these sessions on your strength days.

Weeks	How often	What to do
1 to 4 (learn the lifts)	Twice a week	Squat jumps first, landing in place: 3 × 5. Leg press and dumbbell Romanian deadlift: 2 × 10 to 12. Barbell split squat, light: 2 × 8 to 10 on each leg. Lat pull-down and dumbbell bench press: 2 × 10 to 12. Single-leg calf raise: 2 × 10 to 12 on each leg. Suitcase carry: 2 × 30 to 45 seconds on each side. Use weights you could lift a few more times.
5 to 13 (heavy)	Twice a week	Jumps first, with full rest: box jumps 3 × 5 in weeks 5 to 9, then broad jumps 3 × 5 and single-leg hop and stick 2 × 4 on each leg in weeks 10 to 13. Leg press and barbell Romanian deadlift: 3 × 4 to 6, heavy, with a rep or two to spare. Barbell split squat: 2 × 6 to 8 on each leg. Lat pull-down and dumbbell bench press: 3 × 6 to 8. Single-leg calf raise: 3 × 8 to 12 on each leg. Suitcase carry: 2 × 30 to 45 seconds on each side, heavier over time.
14 and 15 (taper)	Once a week	Leg press and Romanian deadlift: 2 × 4 to 6 at the same weight. Lat pull-down and dumbbell bench press: 2 × 6 to 8. Single-leg calf raise: 2 × 8 to 12 on each leg. Leave out the jumps.
16 (race week)	None	Rest from strength.

- **Put heavy leg days** two or more days before the long run and away from hard sessions where you can.
- **Squat instead of the leg press** once you know the lift (see "Learning a new lift").
- **Jumps follow** the beginner progression in "Plyometrics: jumps and throws": land quietly, and move on only when landings are controlled.
- **Upper body too:** a pull and a push each session keep your whole body strong, as "How much exercise is enough?" recommends.

Fueling and drinking

- **Long runs over about 75 minutes:** practice taking 30 to 60 grams of carbohydrate an hour, such as an energy gel (a small packet of quick carbohydrate) every 30 minutes, starting in the first 30 to 45 minutes (see "Fueling for endurance events").
- **Two days before the race:** make carbohydrate the bulk of your meals if you expect to run longer than about 90 minutes.
- **Race morning:** a familiar, carbohydrate-rich breakfast 1 to 4 hours before.
- **Drink to thirst,** in training and in the race. Don't finish heavier than you started (see "Hydration, sodium and race day").
- **Nothing new on race day:** shoes, clothes, breakfast and gels should all be tested on long runs.

Race day

- **Start easy.** The first 3 miles should feel almost too slow.
- **Fuel on your practiced schedule.**
- **Your race will be longer than your longest run.** That's normal; the taper, fueling and an easy start carry you the rest of the way.
- **Walk breaks are fine** if you need them.

After the race

- Take about a week of easy running or walking, then build back up.
- Next steps: a faster half marathon with the advanced series (coming), or a marathon.

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- Soreness or injury?
- Missed a week? Getting back on track

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