Plan: your first marathon

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Train for 19 weeks with four runs a week. The long run builds from 75 minutes to 3 hours, never more than about 10% beyond your longest in the past month, with an easier week every fourth week and a three-week taper (a planned cut in training before race day so you start fresh). Practice your race fueling on every long run.

Why it matters: A marathon (26.2 miles) often takes first-timers four hours or more. It rewards patience: gradual building lowers injury risk (see "Running injuries"), and fueling well delays "hitting the wall" (see "Fueling for endurance events").

Who it suits

- People who have finished a half marathon, or can run 75 minutes easily, and run at least four days a week.
- Not there yet? Do "Plan: your first half marathon" first.
- **Check with your doctor** first if you have a heart condition or other health concern (see "Exercise with a health condition").

What it costs

Item	Commitment
Running	4 sessions a week, 30 minutes to 3 hours
Strength	2 sessions a week, about 40 to 45 minutes; 1 during the taper
Total time	About 6 to 7½ hours a week at the peak, including strength
Equipment	Running shoes (broken in), a watch, gels or chews, and anti-chafe balm
Difficulty	Intermediate

How the sessions work

- **Easy:** you can talk in full sentences (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 and 2 minutes easy, then 10 minutes easy.
- **Steady:** after 10 minutes easy, run at a "comfortably hard" pace, then 10 minutes easy.
- **Race effort:** the pace you plan to hold in the marathon, which for most people is easier than steady. Repeats come after 10 minutes easy, with 2 minutes easy between them and 10 minutes easy to finish.
- **Long run:** easy pace, with race-effort finishes where shown. Walking breaks are fine.
- **Sample week:** Tuesday faster session, Wednesday easy run, Friday easy run, Saturday or Sunday long run; strength on two other days, not the day before the long run.
- **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 19-week plan

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

Week	Easy run	Faster session	Easy run	Long run
1	40	40 easy with strides	35	75
2	40	Intervals, 4 rounds (40)	40	82
3	45	Steady 20 (40)	40	90
4 (easier)	35	35 easy with strides	30	75
5	45	Intervals, 5 rounds (45)	40	99
6	45	Steady 25 (45)	45	108
7	50	Intervals, 6 rounds (50)	45	118
8 (easier)	40	40 easy with strides	35	95
9	50	3 × 10 min at race effort (54)	45	130
10	50	Steady 30 (50)	45	142
11	55	3 × 12 min at race effort (60)	50	155, last 20 at race effort
12 (easier)	45	40 easy with strides	40	120
13	55	2 × 20 min at race effort (62)	50	165
14	60	Steady 30 (50)	50	175, last 30 at race effort
15 (easier)	45	45 easy with strides	40	140
16 (peak)	60	2 × 20 min at race effort (62)	50	180
17 (taper)	50	2 × 15 min at race effort (52)	45	140
18 (taper)	40	2 × 10 min at race effort (42)	35	90
19 (race week)	45	40 easy with 3 × 5 min at race effort	30, two days before	Race

Check your progress: each long run stays within about 10% of your longest in the past month. Weeks 17 to 19 cut weekly running time to about 80%, 60% and a third of week 16, not counting the race. Add an optional 20-minute easy run in race week if you feel flat (see "Tapering before a race").

Why stop at 3 hours? Many coaches cap long runs around 3 hours because longer runs add fatigue and injury risk faster than fitness. This is common practice, not a tested rule. Race day will be the one big step up; the taper and fueling carry you through it.

If you miss time: don't jump back to where the plan says. Repeat the last week you completed (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 16 (heavy)	Twice a week	Jumps first, with full rest: box jumps 3 × 5 in weeks 5 to 10, then broad jumps 3 × 5 and single-leg hop and stick 2 × 4 on each leg in weeks 11 to 16. 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.
17 and 18 (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.
19 (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

- **Every long run over about 75 minutes:** practice 30 to 60 grams of carbohydrate an hour, starting in the first 30 to 45 minutes. On runs over 2½ hours, you can try working up toward 90 grams an hour with glucose-fructose products if your stomach allows (see "Fueling for endurance events").
- **Two days before the race:** carbohydrate loading. See "Race week and race-morning eating."
- **Drink to thirst.** Weigh yourself before and after a long run; never finish heavier (see "Hydration, sodium and race day").
- **Nothing new on race day.**

Race day

- **Start slower than race effort** for the first few miles.
- **Fuel early and on schedule,** before you feel you need it.
- **Expect the last 6 miles to be hard.** That's normal.
- **Seek help** for confusion, severe headache, vomiting, or chest pain.

After the race

- Take one to two weeks of walking or very easy running.
- Build back up gradually before your next goal.

Related guides

- Plan: your first half marathon
- Race week and race-morning eating
- Missed a week? Getting back on track

Related articles

- Endurance training basics
- Running injuries
- Tapering before a race
- Fueling for endurance events
- Hydration, sodium and race day