Surviving the MARATHON FREAK-OUT

A Guide to Running Your Best Marathon

GREG McMILLAN, M.S.
Get the Latest and Greatest!

With the purchase of this book, you now have another person (me) on your support team as you head into your marathon. I’m very much looking forward to working with you for the best marathon of your life.

In order to help you get the most out of this Guide, step one is to “register” your book, which sounds more glamorous than it is.

Just send an email to coachgreg@mcmillanrunning.com to let me know you have the book.

I can then keep you updated as I add to the book and have more tips and advice to share. Simple as that.
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My Promise

Don't worry. It's going to be okay. I promise. I know you've been training for the big day (a.k.a. marathon day) for a while now so it's normal to get anxious as the day approaches. I've been there too. As a runner, I've dealt with the rigors of marathon training and the nervousness as the race nears, none more so than before my first marathon, the New York City Marathon or before I won the National Masters Trail Marathon Championships a few years ago.

As a coach, I've trained thousands of runners just like you for marathons around the globe, in every weather condition and over all types of crazy terrain. Trust me. We got this. Let me walk you through my survival guide to these last couple of weeks before your race so you go into the big day with more confidence, leaving no stone unturned and ready for a peak performance in what I guarantee will be one of the greatest accomplishments of your life.

What you are about to read is what I use with my athletes no matter their goal: getting to the finish line in one piece, setting a new Personal Best, qualifying for the Boston Marathon or even preparing for the Olympic Games. I've helped runners do all of these and my peaking plans will help you get to the start line fit, rested and ready. As you'll quickly see, race day is simply a celebration of all the hard work you've completed and a chance to let your performance shine!

(And soon enough, you'll be planning your next marathon.)

Greg
“I dare you to train for a marathon and not have it change your life.” – Susan Sidoriak
First Things First!

First, pat yourself on the back. Training for a marathon is not easy and often does not go smoothly but getting to the starting line shows your dedication and determination. The race is the icing on the cake. As race week approaches, nervousness can seem overwhelming. Take time to remember to thank those who have supported you in your marathon quest. You know who they are and they’ll appreciate that you recognize all they’ve done to help you.

Also, take some time to congratulate YOU. I bet you learned a lot about yourself over the last few weeks. You laced ‘em up and went for runs when you really didn’t want to. You made better food choices (at times reluctantly). You stretched (occasionally) and tried every trick in the book to keep your muscles happy (even the dreaded ice bath). You braved good weather and bad weather. You squeezed runs in when you had to. You experimented (successfully and unsuccessfully) with different foods to keep your digestive system happy and to find your perfect marathon diet plan. You talked more about chaffing, running shoes, pace, distance, GPS, fartleks and energy gels than you ever thought possible. In the end, you learned that when you set your mind to something, you can do it. And here’s a little sneak peak: The marathon will be no different. You can do it.

Ok. Let’s get down to business.
Help! I’m Freaking Out!

The two weeks prior to the marathon is what I call the ‘great marathon freak out’. Questions abound. Self-doubt creeps in. Fear is ever-present. The marathon becomes monumental. Don’t worry. Everyone feels this way.

We put so much into training and want desperately for the race to go well. Use this peaking time to reflect on all your successes during training. Think good thoughts. Run strong in the remaining workouts and focus on relaxing the body/mind. Negative thoughts will creep in but just push them aside and focus on the positive. Don’t over rest or overeat but just relax and smile.

In this guide, I’m going to show you how to do all of these so you “peak” for marathon day. Peaking means bringing your mind and your body to a point where you can get the absolute most from yourself on race day. You’ll follow my tried and true peaking training plans and I’ll walk you through what you should do before, during and after the race. The result? You’ll give yourself the best shot at success on race day. You will have controlled all that you can control and then, it’s just a matter of doing your absolute best on the day.

I’ve lived through this marathon freak out with thousands of runners, over the last 20 years, many just like you. The freak out strikes some runners more severely than others but no matter how much you are freaking out, these guidelines offer comfort and confidence.
“Don’t worry. Everything is going to be amazing.” - Unknown
How to Peak for the Marathon

I figured this peaking thing out. It took a while because, like many coaches, I fell into the standard "tapering" model we’ve all been taught. Problem was, tapering didn’t work consistently. The results were just as hit-or-miss as not tapering at all.

So, I threw "tapering" out of my vocabulary. I replaced it with "peaking." Semantics? Maybe. But by studying peak performance research - both physiological as well as psychological - as opposed to just the tapering research, I’ve been able to dial in how to truly peak on marathon day. It works for all athletes no matter where you find yourself in the pack come race day.

Here are my guidelines for your peaking phase - the last 14 days before your marathon – and these ideas form the basis of my peaking training plans in this book as well as my guidance for what you should do before, during and after the marathon:

#1: Don’t change your weekly running routine

Our bodies and minds like routine. If you run three days per week, then run three days per week during your peaking phase. If you run five, then run five. Your legs will feel heavy and “flat” if you suddenly run less frequently than normal. Here’s a quick story to prove the point:

A few years ago, I coached a new runner program here in San Diego. A masters female runner (who ran 4 days per week) was prepped and ready for a great marathon. On race day, however, she ran horribly and was nowhere close to her goal time. When we met up a few days after the race, I asked her what went wrong. “I don’t know Greg. The training was great and I feel your workouts really prepared me for the race,” she said shrugging her shoulders. After a little more investigation, I found the problem. I asked her about race week, a time when things can go wrong
if you aren’t careful. “Race week was great. Because I wanted to really rest up for the marathon, I took Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday off. I wanted to save all my energy for the marathon on Sunday,” she revealed. Bingo! There it was.

Her body was used to running four times per week and suddenly she rested for four straight days. Every runner knows how awful you feel if you miss a few days of running. You feel like you’ve never run before in your life! And, that’s exactly how she felt. She was completely flat on race day. She learned this rule the hard way and it was a great reminder for me and now you. Stick to your running rhythm during the peaking phase.

That said, there is one exception to this rule: Runners who feel they are on the edge of overtraining or are nursing a sore muscle or niggling injury may take an extra day off each week during the peaking phase. But, don’t take it the day before the last long run or the race if you don’t normally rest the day before your long runs. This risks feeling flat on race morning.

**#2: Reduce weekly training volume, but not too much**

Over the last 10-14 days before your race, you should progressively reduce the volume of your running. Two weeks out from the race, I like to reduce the daily volume by 10-20 minutes or so. For most runners, that’s no big deal. But, what if you only run 30 minutes per day normally? Still follow the plan. Reduce your run to 10-20 minutes (30 minutes minus 10-20 minutes). It will feel like you spent more time getting ready for the run than going for the run but your body will benefit even from very short runs.

The week of the race, reduce your normal daily volume approximately 20-30 minutes. (Again, this may mean low mileage runners may only run 10-20 minutes but that’s okay.) This, along with the normal reduction in your long run length as the race nears, will drop your overall running volume in line with what we know from
research (and, more importantly, from practical experience) to the level that allows the body to get prepared for a peak performance (~20-40% total reduction in training volume depending on the athlete).

The extent of your volume reduction during the peaking phase depends on your normal training volume and how tired you feel from the training. Lower mileage and rested athletes will reduce volume less than high mileage runners who are fatigued from training.

That said, don't make the common mistake of dropping your volume too much. This takes your body out of its routine and can leave you stale on race day. My opinion is that more runners fail because of tapering too much (see #1 above) rather than not enough.

#3: Keep the engine revved

While we may want to reduce the volume of running, we do not want to reduce the intensity of our workouts. In fact, we may want the intensity to increase. You want to keep your engine revved, the pumps primed. Never race your workouts, but during the peaking phase, don’t back off from all faster running either. I’ve found that some fast running in the peaking phase helps bring the body and the mind to tiptop condition on race day. (See my Peaking Plans in the next section for the workouts I recommend.)

While these workouts aren’t “push it to the max” workouts, they should help build your running economy (think of it as better gas mileage) and dial in your goal pace. Done correctly, the peaking workouts stress the body less but leave you with an engine that is primed and ready to deliver on race day.

#4: Plan your strategy and stick with it
Most marathoners have the same race strategy - start conservative, build into race pace, run as efficiently as possible and get as deep in the race as possible before you have to pull out your super powers to get you to the finish line. Yours may vary, depending on your strength and preferences, but no matter what your strategy, stick with it.

For most runners, their pre-race strategy is the best strategy. Be open to change if the conditions require, but for the most part, you know what you need to do so, just get out of your own way and let the race unfold as planned.

Of course, the biggest error is feeling great in the first few miles (which should feel easy any way) and deciding, “I think I’ll put some time in the bank in case I slow down later.” Big no no. Your faster pace may feel easy but you are burning essential stored carbohydrates and stressing your muscle tissues too much, too soon. Later in the race, you’ll pay for it and can easily lose several minutes per mile compared to the few seconds per mile you “banked” early in the race.

(Later in the book, I provide my pace chart for running your best even or negative split race.)

#5: Reflect on training to build confidence

I like athletes to reflect on training in two ways. First, think back on a particularly tough workout, one where you didn’t feel great but you gutted it out. You were tough. This shows that you can do it. You are tough. You can handle the ups and downs of running and get to the finish line. This will be required in your marathon, so instead of thinking of that run as a “bad” workout, see it as revealing your inner strength.

Now, think back to your best workouts or races. Really re-live them in your mind. Bolster your confidence knowing that you are fit, fast and ready. Bring on the race!
Get excited to go out there and perform like you know you can! Your training successes should build your confidence and confidence is a key part of the peaking process.

In fact, your homework is to review your training plan and highlight 2-3 runs/workouts/races where you felt great, really awesome. Put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and write down everything you remember about the day. Come at it from all your senses and really “feel” the run. Then, start to read about these great runs every few days as the race nears. You’ll be surprised how this ongoing positive mental stimulus can carry over into the race.

#6: Have fun and smile

Let’s face it. Most of us aren’t going for an Olympic gold medal here. We are simply enjoying the challenge of doing our best. There is no real pressure, so quit putting so much on yourself. We run for fun, and you should remember that. Have fun! I encourage runners to smile a lot in the final days before a race. Smiling puts you in a better mood, reduces anxiety and that can play a big role on race day.

It’s only with a positive, happy mindset focused on doing your best, combined with a well-trained body that is rested but revved, fueled and hydrated that you can race your best.
“The will to win means nothing without the will to prepare.” – Juma Ikangaa
McMillan Marathon Peaking Plans

On the next few pages are my proven marathon peaking plans to help you be fully prepared for your best marathon performance. You may need to alter the plan to fit the exact days of the week (though I’ve included lots of daily options for you) that you run but the bottom line is that these peaking plans work. You can really trust in them. And, the confidence that you are doing training that has proven itself over and over can go a long way to reducing your stress during this freak out phase.

Important Notes:

As you browse through the peaking plans, keep a few things in mind. First, the plans are listed by the number of days you run per week. For example, the first set of plans is for the runner who runs 2-3 times per week. The next set is for runners who run 4-5 times per week and the last set is for the runner who gets in 6-7 runs per week. Choose whatever best fits the routine you’ve been using.

Second, two versions of each plan are provided. The first version is the “Endurance Monster” version. This schedule is best for runners who find they are significantly better at the longer distances than at the shorter distances. The endurance monster is typically the runner who excels at long runs and steady effort runs but struggles with speedwork and shorter races. If this sounds like you, then choose the Endurance Monster version.

The alternative version is the Speedster version. As you would guess, these runners are the opposite of the Endurance Monster. They’re better at the shorter races and speed training but don’t perform as well in longer training sessions and races. In other words, the marathon is an event that doesn’t come as naturally to the Speedster as it does the Endurance Monster. Choose this version if you are a Speedster.

(Get my book **YOU (Only Faster)** if you are having trouble determining your type. I go into detail about how I determine the runner type in the athletes I coach.)
Read this very carefully as this is an important note: early in your training plan, you had to push hard in workouts in order to build your fitness. That's not what we’re doing in the peaking phase. The fitness has been built so in these last two weeks, we’re working on *refining* your fitness. In other words, we want to run quickly and within the recommended pace ranges from the McMillan Running Calculator but we want to do it as relaxed and easily as possible. Make sense? Don't leave your race in training by going too hard in the last two weeks. Keep it challenging but under control. Think peak, not push.

Lastly, use commonsense when incorporating the peaking plans. If you've never done faster repeats, then skip them and just focus on goal pace/tempo running. If, however, you have some experience with faster running, then enjoy these economy building faster workouts. Again, you aren't trying to build fitness here but instead are simply trying to get your body and mind primed for a peak marathon performance. And if you can't figure out if you're a speedster or endurance monster, choose the program that looks the most fun to you. Both work well so you can’t go wrong either way.

NOTE: Ereaders (Kindle, Nook, etc.) display training plans very poorly. If you would like a copy of your peaking plan in a more readable format, just [email me](mailto:emailme@McMillanRunning.com) and I’ll send you a PDF of your plan.

There is a “workout decoder” after the training plans, which explains all the workout acronyms (ER, TR, CI, FFLR, etc.) that you’ll see in the training plans.

The plans are listed in the following order:

2-3 days running per week (Endurance Monster Version)

2-3 days per week (Speedster Version)

4-5 days per week (Endurance Monster Version)
4-5 days per week (Speedster Version)

6-7 days per week (Endurance Monster Version)

6-7 days per week (Speedster Version)
# McMillan Running
## 2-3 days per week
### Marathon Peaking Plan (Endurance Monster Version)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Progression Long Run: 90 min (30 min LR pace, 30 min Goal Marathon Pace, 30 min FAST!)</td>
<td>Previous LR’s for endurance. This one for effort progression. Last 30 min should feel like a 10K race. Test gear &amp; nutrition. Visualize strong marathon finish! Use <a href="https://mcmillanrunning.com">mcmillanrunning.com</a> to calculate paces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>OFF - Complete recovery; recharge mentally; allow fuel stores to build; veg out</td>
<td>Rest is often neglected. During rest your body becomes stronger &amp; ready for a peak performance. Today is complete day off from all activity. Just rest, eat well &amp; forget about the marathon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>30-45 min Easy Run OR Cross-Train</td>
<td>Run easy or take this day off. Allow the body &amp; mind to rest. Check race day weather. Research race site restaurants. Re-live best LR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tempo Run: 20-30 min</td>
<td>Warm up &amp; cool down w/ 10-15 min easy running. These medium-effort continuous run work well for endurance-oriented runners. Test shoes &amp; gear. Think smooth &amp; relaxed while running. Visualize beautiful running form. Review paces at <a href="https://www.mcmillanrunning.com">www.mcmillanrunning.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>OFF - Complete recovery</td>
<td>Take this day off. Allow the body &amp; mind to rest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>30-40 min Easy Run OR Cross-Train</td>
<td>Run easy or take this day off. Allow the body &amp; mind to rest. Check race day weather. Review course map &amp; race plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>12 miles total: 6 miles Easy Run + 6 Miles at Goal Marathon Pace</td>
<td>This is your final marathon LR. Test shoes, gear &amp; nutrition plan. How relaxed can you run at marathon pace?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>OFF - Complete recovery</td>
<td>Schedule a diversion so you don’t think about the marathon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>ER w/ Pace Change: 4-5 x 30 sec at ~10K pace w/ 1 min easy jog</td>
<td>Warm up &amp; cool down w/ 10-15 min easy running. Faster repeats improve running economy &amp; ramp up readiness for the marathon. Alternate fast, relaxed running w/ easy jogging. Don’t push too hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tempo Run: 10-20 min</td>
<td>Warm up &amp; cool down w/ 10-15 min easy running. More Medium-effort running to groove relaxed rhythm. Final test of marathon shoes &amp; gear. Re-live previous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
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<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20-40 min Easy Run or OFF</td>
<td>Nice &amp; gentle. Good fuel. Check race weather. Make final packing list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>OFF or Cross-Train</td>
<td>Often travel day, take day off or just cross-train at easy effort for no more than 30 min. Allow the body &amp; mind to rest. Good nutrition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>30 min Easy Run OR Cross-Train</td>
<td>I like to jog for an easy jog the day before. Helps calm the nerves &amp; make the day go by faster. Repeat, “I am ready” throughout day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Race Day! Smile &amp; enjoy</td>
<td>Can’t wait to hear how it goes – <a href="mailto:coachgreg@mcmillanrunning.com">coachgreg@mcmillanrunning.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# McMillan Running

## 2-3 days per week

### Marathon Peaking Plan (Speedster Version)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Exercise</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Progression Long Run: 90 min (30 min LR pace, 30 min Goal Marathon Pace, 30 min FAST!)</td>
<td>Previous LR for endurance. This one for effort progression. Last 30 min should feel like a 10K race. Test gear &amp; nutrition. Visualize strong marathon finish! Use <a href="http://mcmillanrunning.com">mcmillanrunning.com</a> to calculate paces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>OFF - Complete recovery; recharge mentally; allow fuel stores to build; veg out</td>
<td>Rest is often neglected. During rest your body becomes stronger &amp; ready for a peak performance. Today is complete day off from all activity. Just rest, eat well &amp; forget about the marathon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>20-45 min Easy Run OR Cross-Train</td>
<td>Run easy or take this day off. Allow the body &amp; mind to rest. Check race day weather. Research race site restaurants. Re-live best LR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tempo Intervals: 3 x 2000 meters w/ 2 min easy jog between</td>
<td>Warm up &amp; cool down w/ 10-15 min easy running. These medium-effort repeats work well for speedster runners. Test shoes &amp; gear. Think smooth &amp; relaxed while running. Visualize beautiful running form. Review paces at <a href="http://www.mcmillanrunning.com">www.mcmillanrunning.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>OFF - Complete recovery</td>
<td>Take this day off. Allow the body &amp; mind to rest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>20-30 min Easy Run OR Cross-Train</td>
<td>Run easy or take this day off. Allow the body &amp; mind to rest. Check race day weather. Review course map &amp; race plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>12 miles total: 6 miles Easy Run + 6 Miles at Goal Marathon Pace</td>
<td>This is your final marathon LR. Test shoes, gear &amp; nutrition plan. How relaxed can you run at marathon pace?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>OFF - Complete recovery</td>
<td>Schedule a diversion so you don’t think about the marathon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>ER w/ Pace Change: 4-5 x 1 min at ~5K pace w/ 1 min easy jog</td>
<td>Warm up &amp; cool down w/ 10-15 min easy running. Faster repeats improve running economy &amp; ramp up readiness for the marathon. Alternate fast, relaxed running w/ easy jogging. Don’t push too hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cruise Intervals: 4-5 x 1000 meters w/ 1 min easy jog</td>
<td>Warm up &amp; cool down w/ 10-15 min easy running. More medium-effort repeats to groove rhythm. Final test of marathon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>OFF or Cross-Train</td>
<td>Often travel day, take day off or just cross-train at easy effort for no more than 30 min. Allow the body &amp; mind to rest. Good nutrition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>30 min Easy Run OR Cross-Train</td>
<td>I like to jog for an easy jog the day before. Helps calm the nerves &amp; make the day go by faster. Repeat, ”I am ready” throughout day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Race Day! Smile &amp; enjoy</td>
<td>Can’t wait to hear how it goes – <a href="mailto:coachgreg@mcmillanrunning.com">coachgreg@mcmillanrunning.com</a></td>
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<th>Day</th>
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<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Fast Finish Long Run: 14-18 total miles w/ last 6-8 miles @ marathon pace or faster</td>
<td>Previous LRs for endurance. This one for effort progression. Last 6-8 miles average goal pace but last 2 miles should feel like a 5K race. Test gear &amp; nutrition. Visualize strong marathon finish! Use <a href="https://mcmillanrunning.com">mcmillanrunning.com</a> to calculate paces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>OFF or Cross-Train</td>
<td>Rest is often neglected. During rest your body becomes stronger &amp; ready for a peak performance. Today is complete day off from all activity. Just rest, eat well &amp; forget about the marathon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>ER w/ Pace Change: 8-10 x 1 min at ~10K pace w/ 1 min easy jog</td>
<td>Warm up &amp; cool down w/ 10-15 min easy running. Faster repeats improve running economy &amp; ramp up readiness for the marathon. Alternate fast, relaxed running w/ easy jogging. Don’t push too hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>30-45 min Easy Run OR Cross-Train</td>
<td>Run easy or just cross-train at an easy effort &amp; for no more than 45 min. Allow the body &amp; mind to rest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>40-50 min Easy Run OR Cross-Train</td>
<td>Run easy or just cross-train at an easy effort &amp; for no more than 50 min. Check race day weather. Review course map &amp; race plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>12 miles total: 6 miles Easy Run + 6 Miles at Goal Marathon Pace</td>
<td>This is your final marathon LR. Test shoes, gear &amp; nutrition plan. How relaxed can you run at marathon pace?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>OFF or Cross-Train</td>
<td>Schedule a diversion so you don’t think about the marathon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>40-50 min Easy Run</td>
<td>Nice &amp; easy run on your favorite running route.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tempo Run: 15-20 min</td>
<td>Warm up &amp; cool down w/ 10-15 min easy running. More Medium-effort running to groove relaxed rhythm. Final test of marathon shoes &amp; gear. Re-live previous awesome runs. Review race plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>30-40 min Easy Run</td>
<td>Nice &amp; gentle. Good fuel. Check race weather. Make final packing list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>30-40 min Easy Run or OFF</td>
<td>Often travel day, take day off or just run at easy effort for no more than 40 min. Allow the body &amp; mind to rest. Good nutrition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>30 min Easy Run OR Cross-Train</td>
<td>I like to jog for an easy jog the day before. Helps calm the nerves &amp; make the day go by faster. Repeat, “I am ready” throughout day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Race Day! Smile &amp; enjoy</td>
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### McMillan Running

#### 4-5 days per week

#### Marathon Peaking Plan (Speedster Version)

<p>| 14 | Fast Finish Long Run: 14-18 total miles w/ last 6-8 miles @ marathon pace or faster | Previous LR's for endurance. This one for effort progression. Last 6-8 miles average goal pace but last 2 miles should feel like a 5K race. Test gear &amp; nutrition. Visualize strong marathon finish! Use mcmillanrunning.com to calculate paces |
| 13 | OFF or Cross-Train | Rest is often neglected. During rest your body becomes stronger &amp; ready for a peak performance. Today is complete day off from all activity. Just rest, eat well &amp; forget about the marathon. |
| 12 | ER w/ Pace Change: 8-10 x 1 min at ~10K pace w/ 1 min easy jog | Warm up &amp; cool down w/ 10-15 min easy running. Faster repeats improve running economy &amp; ramp up readiness for the marathon. Alternate fast, relaxed running w/ easy jogging. Don’t push too hard. |
| 10 | Tempo Intervals: 3-4 x 2000 meters w/ 2 min easy jog | Warm up &amp; cool down w/ 10-15 min easy running. Medium-effort repetitions work well for speed-oriented runners. Test shoes &amp; gear. Think smooth &amp; relaxed while running. Visualize beautiful running form. Review paces at <a href="http://www.mcmillanrunning.com">www.mcmillanrunning.com</a> |
| 9 | 30-45 min Easy Run OR Cross-Train | Run easy or just cross-train at an easy effort &amp; for no more than 45 min. Allow the body &amp; mind to rest. |
| 8 | 40-50 min Easy Run OR Cross-Train | Run easy or just cross-train at an easy effort &amp; for no more than 50 min. Check race day weather. Review course map &amp; race plan. |
| 7 | 12 miles total: 6 miles Easy Run + 6 Miles at Goal Marathon Pace | This is your final marathon LR. Test shoes, gear &amp; nutrition plan. How relaxed can you run at marathon pace? |
| 6 | OFF or Cross-Train | Schedule a diversion so you don’t think about the marathon. |
| 5 | Leg Speed: 8-10 x 25 sec w/ 1 min easy jog | Warm up &amp; cool down w/ 10-15 min easy running. “Strides” like these help activate your neuromuscular system. |</p>
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### McMillan Running
6-7 days per week
Marathon Peaking Plan
(Endurance Monster Version)

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McMillan Peaking Workouts

Below are descriptions for each of the workouts included in your peaking plan. You can always visit https://run.mcmillanrunning.com/learn/ to read about each in more detail.

While the focus of this book has been on the peaking phase, I’m available to build a full marathon training plan for you if you like. Just email me or visit https://run.mcmillanrunning.com/ and sign up.

I’ve also written a book, YOU (Only Faster), which is a great complement to this book and contains more information on training not only for the marathon but also for the 5K, 10K and half-marathon.

Lastly, you need to use the McMillan Running Calculator to calculate your training paces (and heart rate zones if you prefer) for your runs. I created this calculator to take the guesswork out of training. Just hit the pace ranges listed and you will know that you are training optimally. You can also see equivalent times for other distances to see if they predict your marathon time. Plus, there are a lot of other resources to help you run your best.
Workout Decoder

**Easy Run** (ER) = Continuous runs at an easy effort.
The majority of your training is likely to be comprised of easy runs and the purpose is to fully develop your aerobic fitness and then maintain it. Easy runs last anywhere between 15 minutes to 90 minutes. Again, one of the common mistakes we make is running our easy runs too fast. Keep them steady but don’t get into a pace where your breathing becomes noticeably faster.

**Long Run** (LR) = Continuous runs at an easy effort but for long distances.
Long runs need no introduction for marathoners. The purpose is simply time on your feet. Challenging your ability to keep running improves your endurance and is a cornerstone of distance training. Long runs last at least an hour and up to over three. They are slow runs with the challenge of simply running a steady pace for the entire duration of the run. Keep the effort easy and resist the temptation to increase the pace just to get home sooner. Give the body time to really feel the stimulus of a long run. It will reward you with greater endurance adaptations that will serve you well in later workouts and races.

**Progression Long Run** (PLR) = Continuous run where the pace gets faster across the run.
A progression run is a continuous run that progresses from one training zone to a faster zone. For example, you can start a run at long run pace for 1/3 then move to marathon goal pace for the middle 1/3 then finish faster like 10K race effort for the final 1/3. Again, the specifics aren’t the key ingredient; it’s the process of moving from zone to zone.

**Fast Finish Long Run** (FFLR) = Continuous run where last few miles are progressively faster and the last 2 miles are near all out effort.
In the fast finish long run, you run the first part of the run at your normal long run pace but then over the final portion of the run, you begin to pick up the pace so that
the last 30 minutes to one hour is at a hard effort. I’ve had particularly good results with fast finish long runs, and they really help fix the fade that can occur in the marathon.

Note: These are tough workouts so make sure to really focus on recovery in the few days after each.

**Tempo Run** (TR) = Continuous runs at a medium effort to build stamina.
Tempo runs are designed to increase your stamina. As the name suggests, you really improve your running tempo or rhythm with these workouts. They last between 15 and 30 minutes and are meant to be "comfortably hard" so don’t push the pace but find that perfect balance between easy and hard.

Tempo runs are continuous efforts but you must preface them with a thorough warm-up.

**Tempo Intervals** (TI) = Repeats at a medium effort with recovery jogs between.
Tempo Intervals are like fast Tempo Runs broken into repeats with relatively short recovery jogs. Unlike the previous workouts, Tempo Intervals are the first workouts to allow for a recovery jog between hard efforts.

**Cruise Intervals** (CI) = Repeats at a medium-hard effort with recovery jogs between.
The Cruise Interval workout was popularized by the running coach, Jack Daniels. They, like the other Stamina workouts, are meant to increase your lactate threshold pace. Cruise Intervals are a shorter and slightly more intense version of Tempo Intervals. Like Tempo Intervals, they are followed by short recovery jogs. You’ll probably find that it’s easy to run too fast on these. The tendency is to treat them like regular long intervals. However, keep it under control and work on a smooth, fast rhythm. Control in training is key to improvement.

**Pace Change** (PC) = Alternating repetitions at 5K-10K effort with recovery jogs between.
Pace Change workouts (often called Fartlek runs, fartlek means speed play in Swedish) are a favorite of mine because they are effort-based and take the pressure off of hitting exact splits on the track or a marked course. Instead of an organized distance-based workout on the track (like 10 times 400 meters with a 200 meter recovery jog), a pace change run is time-based (like 10 times 1 minute with 1 minute recovery jog) and run more by effort than a specific pace. When athletes can't (or don't want to) run on a track or marked course, they often perform the workout as a pace change by converting the track workout with its distance orientation to a pace change workout with its time orientation.

Pace change workouts involve repetitions with recovery jogs in between. The effort for the repetitions is around 5K-10K race effort with slower running as recovery between.

**Leg Speed** (LS): Alternating repetitions at <5K speed with recovery jogs between.

You're probably familiar with "Strides" though you may call them windsprints, pickups, striders or stride outs. They're not unlike the fast accelerations that you do right before a race. Strides work to improve your sprinting technique by teaching the legs to turn over quickly. It's really the neuromuscular system that we're trying to develop here which is why they are short and won't cause your breathe to get out of control. We don't want lactic acid to build up during each stride. This inhibits the nervous system and interferes with the neuromuscular adaptations that we want. Accordingly, after each stride, you must jog easily for a minimum of 30 seconds and up to a minute and a half to make sure the muscles are ready for the next one. Not allowing for sufficient recovery after each stride is a common mistake. Take advantage of the longer recovery. It will allow you to put more effort into each stride which really helps develop your speed.

Note that this is not all-out sprinting. Run fast but always stay under control. These are quick efforts where you practice good form. You'll be amazed at how much your finishing kick improves with these workouts.
Cross-Train (XT): Other fitness building activities like ElliptiGO, cycling, swimming, etc. Effort matches running effort.

What is the best cross-training activity for runners? That comes down to personal preference but any activity that builds your fitness, whether that be your training fitness (like ElliptiGO running, swimming, cycling), your injury-proofing (like resistance training, balance training, core workouts) or your recovery-enhancement (like yoga) is great. Find something that works for you.

The key in your marathon peaking phase is that you keep the intensity of these activities very low. You want to exercise but you also want to remember that you are gradually lessening the training stress so your body will come to a peak on race day.

Goal Marathon Pace (GMP): Your goal pace for your upcoming marathon.

This workout needs no introduction as it is simply running as relaxed as possible at your goal marathon pace.
“If you can dream it, you can do it.” – Walt Disney
Pre-Race Rules

Now that you are peaked and ready for the race, here are my rules to use as you head to the race site and get settled in. These foolproof strategies will make your pre-race more enjoyable and less stressful. You’ll have all your bases covered and if something comes up, it’ll be easy to address because you’ve done such a great job of planning ahead for everything else.

Rule #1: Be Selfish

As a whole, runners tend to not be selfish. In fact, the marathon has become one of the greatest ways charities raise funds. Marathoners are conscientious and giving. The peaking phase, however, is a time when you need to be a little selfish. You have a big race coming up so use the few days before the race as your days. Do what is best for YOU. It’ll feel weird but trust me, you deserve a few days of self focus to ensure you perform your best.

Rule #2: Pack your race gear in your carry-on baggage.

You can always buy new casual clothes but you don’t want to have to buy new shoes and race clothes for the race. Lay all your gear out on the bed (I once heard it called “Dressing the invisible man”) and make sure you pack everything you need in your carry-on bag. Don’t forget Band-Aids, chafing prevention, nutrition, etc. And remember, new TSA security requirements can sometimes limit gels, rehab tools like The Stick and foam rollers in carry-on baggage, so you may have to put those items in your checked baggage or buy them at the race site.

Rule #3: Carry food with you at all times.

In the peaking phase, you never want to get hungry (especially the last 3 days before the race). Again, don’t overeat but just be prepared in case a meeting goes long or you’re late for a meal. Always have a nutritious snack available. In addition to your race gear, pack some good food in your carry-on bag. You may want something to eat on the plane/train/car. The final week before the race is also a good week to
have fluids with you at all times as well. Don’t over drink but just be prepared. Variety in beverages is good as well - water, sports drinks, juices, etc.

**Rule # 4: Book your pre-race dinner BEFORE leaving home.**

You will not be alone in wanting a proven pre-race meal the night before the race. Plan ahead by making a reservation before you even leave home. The concierge at your hotel can recommend restaurants near your hotel or you can do some research online to check menus, etc. Nothing is worse than arriving at the race site and all of the desired restaurants are booked so don’t leave your meal to chance.

Find a relaxing place and enjoy a nice, quiet dinner. I usually try to eat close to my hotel so I can take a leisurely 10-15 minute walk after dinner. Don’t eat too early or too late. And, of course, don’t try a meal that you haven’t already tried in training. Nothing is worse than an upset stomach the night before and certainly during the marathon!

Side note on Carbo-loading: You’ve probably heard that you need to “carbo-load” before your marathon. The reason is that your body stores carbohydrate in your muscles (in a form called glycogen). These glycogen stores are limited, however, and when the stores begin to run low, your pace must slow. The training you’ve been doing helps increase the amount of glycogen stored in your muscles but you can also increase your stores by eating more carbohydrates in your meals, especially in the last 3 days before a long race like a marathon.

I’m a fan of adjusting the proportion of calories coming from carbohydrates in the last 2-3 days before your race but caution runners to not go overboard. You don’t eat more. Let me say this again, you don’t eat *more* calories but you simply include a bit more carbohydrates in your meals than you might otherwise. Remember, your training volume has reduced so your stores are already less compromised than usual and I’ve found just a slight increase in carbohydrate intake works well (i.e., you don’t need to pig out on the carbo dinner the night before; just be reasonable.). Most importantly, eat what has worked for you in training and you’ll be fine.
Rule #5: The first thing you should do after settling into your hotel is find a grocery store.

Ask the front desk for the nearest one or call/research ahead to expedite the process. Go immediately to the grocery store and stock up. Buy the foods you like and you know will prepare you for successful running. I buy bananas, trail mix, water, sports drink, yogurt, instant oat meal (though usually brought from home), boiled eggs, smoked salmon, avocados, bagels and spread, peanut butter and jelly, energy bars, etc. Again, you never want to get thirsty or hungry prior to the race. Being stocked will help avoid this. Don’t just eat out of nervousness (another no-no) but have food available if you need a snack. I typically overbuy but I’d rather have what I want available than to want something and not have it.

Rule #6: Enjoy the expo but don’t spend all day there.

You’ll likely need to visit the expo to pick up your race number, chip, etc. Enjoy it but don’t become an expo adventurer. It’s too much time on your feet. Browse through it, pick up what you need and get out. The expo is where many runners get dehydrated and hungry, so carry fluids and fuel with you to keep this from happening. Again, the expo is part of the marathon ritual so you should enjoy it but if other runners think you are working a booth, you’ve been there too long!

Rule 7: Re-Live Awesome

Remember above where you wrote down your best runs from the last few weeks? It’s time to pull out your memoirs of awesomeness. Once per day for the last three days, spend some time reading about your most successful workouts. Live in your own awesomeness. I guarantee that you’ll be inundated with doubt and negative thoughts during the last few days before the race. It’s perfectly natural. Reminding yourself of your capabilities can help reduce the negative and put the spotlight on the positive.
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<td>Review flight and hotel reservations.</td>
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<td>Locate entry confirmation and put in safe spot where you will remember it on your travel to race.</td>
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<td>Make your initial packing list and buy supplies you will need. Lube, Band-Aids, nutrition products, gear are common purchases.</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Research and make pre-race dinner reservations.</td>
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<td>Begin to watch the weather forecast and adjust packing list accordingly. Better to over pack and not need something than to not have it.</td>
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<td>Make a list of your most awesome runs you did during the marathon training. Remind yourself of how well you can run and how mentally strong you are.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Review starting corral schematics, course map and elevation chart. Watch YouTube videos of race to begin to visualize the race.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Finalize shoes and gear selection.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Finalize nutrition plan – 2-3 days before race, day before race, morning of race, during race, post race.</td>
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<td>Re-read your list of awesome workouts.</td>
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<td>Spread out all your gear and pack systematically. Start with skin (lube, Band-Aids) and move outward. Pack race gear/nutrition first then warm-up gear then post-race gear then casual clothing.</td>
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<td>Think about how grateful you are to be running. To be able to race. Others are not so lucky.</td>
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<td>Pick up bib number, visit expo (not camping out), carve out time for relaxing, add diversion (movie is good) if thinking too much about race.</td>
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“Rise and shine it's running time!” – Vince O'Boyle
Race Day!

Marathon morning will be exciting but you need to plan your morning ahead of time so you can just follow the routine and not stress about anything. You’ll be keyed up but you shouldn’t need to panic about what to do when. Plan your wake up time (though I normally sleep poorly the night before the marathon and wake up several times worrying that I’m going to oversleep!) to allow for your morning breakfast and digestion. Your marathon-specific long runs have provided ample opportunity to figure out your pre-run routine so just follow it. It works.

Breakfast:

Have your proven breakfast, get your bowels empty, get dressed and get to the starting line. Plan this entire routine out for timing. Count backward from the race start and document each minute up until race time. Have breakfast on hand or know where you are going to get it. Stay relaxed. Use your hotel bathroom as much as possible because the portajohns always have a line. (Sample pre-race breakfast plans are in the Frequently Asked Questions section at the end of this book.)

Getting Dressed:

Have your gear laid out the night before (including race bib/chip) so you can just go through the motions getting dressed and ready. Start with your skin and get dressed progressively outward (and don’t forget your race number).

LUBE! The most common pre-race error is forgetting to protect sensitive areas. I use small circular Band-Aids to protect my nipples and lube up under arms, inner thighs and any other area where I chaffed during training runs.

Elevator Madness:

You won’t be the only runner departing for the start line so plan ahead for very slow elevator service. I’d rather get to the lobby early and hang out there (bathrooms are
usually available) than to stress over delayed or full elevators. So, give yourself a few extra minutes on race morning.

**Always prepared:**

Keep fluids and easily digestible foods close at hand up until the start. Remember at some marathons, you'll have to head out to the starting line several hours in advance so plan ahead for fuel, fluids, warm clothes, even a blanket or camping bed roll for relaxing.

I always have some portable, easily digestible food with me up until right before the race. If I ever feel that breakfast is ‘wearing off’, I can have a few bites. I also keep a fluid bottle in hand all the way up to the start. If I’m not carrying my fluids (though I highly recommend you carry your own fluids) then I chuck it within a minute or two before the race. I don't constantly drink but just have it in case I feel the need to drink something or wet my mouth.

**Lining up:**

Lining up for the race can be stressful so plan ahead. Know where your corral/pacing area is and how to get to it. (You may want to scout this the day before the race if the start is close by.) Don’t think you can arrive 10 minutes before the race and step on the line. Plan ahead and you’ll be feeling great because you got into your spot in good time and have your nutritional and fluid needs met.

Monitor the weather for race week so you will know how to dress. I always have some ‘throw away’ gear on hand in case it’s cold. You should have a hat, gloves and t-shirt that can be peeled off and tossed aside if not needed or to toss after warming up during the race. You may want to have an old t-shirt available to wear while waiting in your corral. Most races donate discarded gear to shelters. Again, the better planning you do for race morning, the less stressful it will be.

**Marathon Warm-up:**
Warming up for a marathon is quite different than a 5K or 10K. For the marathon, you actually don't want to be too warmed up before the start. If you are, you're more likely to start too fast. So, I recommend that you just jog easily for 5-10 minutes and let the first few miles of the marathon become your warm up. You'll, of course, have to modify this based on how crowded the starting line is.

If you are in a smaller race, then you can do a short jog then line up just before the gun goes off. At larger races, your warm up will be more of jogging in place in the corral and the walk/jog as your corral advances to the starting line. Either way, don't worry about the extent of your warm up. Just use the first 2-3 miles to get into the groove. You'll quickly settle into marathon pace and your first 2-3 mile splits will help you dial in your pace. But again, don't worry if you are a few seconds slow on the first few miles. You'll easily make this up later in the race.

**Proper Pacing (Even or Negative Split):**

Speaking of pacing, most runners on most courses run best when they run even splits (the first half-marathon and the second half-marathon are run in the same time) or slightly negative splits (first half-marathon slightly slower than the second half-marathon). I like to start out a little slower than goal pace for the first few miles to warm up but then settle into goal pace.

As long as I hit the half-marathon at or preferably up to 2.5% slower than even pace, I run well. If I'm faster than goal pace at the half-marathon, I typically struggle late in the race. So, let me restate: You should shoot for being even to up to 2.5% slower than even pace. The chart below shows the range for various goal marathon times.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal Finish Time</th>
<th>Ideal First Half-Marathon Split Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:00:00</td>
<td>1:00:00 to 1:01:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:15:00</td>
<td>1:07:30 to 1:09:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30:00</td>
<td>1:15:00 to 1:16:52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:45:00</td>
<td>1:22:30 to 1:24:34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00:00</td>
<td>1:30:00 to 1:32:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15:00</td>
<td>1:37:30 to 1:39:56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30:00</td>
<td>1:45:00 to 1:47:37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:45:00</td>
<td>1:52:30 to 1:55:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00:00</td>
<td>2:00:00 to 2:03:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:15:00</td>
<td>2:07:30 to 2:10:41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30:00</td>
<td>2:15:00 to 2:18:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:45:00</td>
<td>2:22:30 to 2:26:04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00:00</td>
<td>2:30:00 to 2:33:45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:15:00</td>
<td>2:37:30 to 2:41:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30:00</td>
<td>2:45:00 to 2:49:07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:45:00</td>
<td>2:52:30 to 2:56:49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00:00</td>
<td>3:00:00 to 3:04:30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of course, we are not robots so you may not hit these time perfectly, but this chart gives you an idea of how much slower you can be in the first half-marathon and still be on track for your goal time. Many runners can be even more negative (even slower in first half-marathon) but I find this chart to work for most runners, including myself.

Always think about running as efficiently and relaxed as possible and don’t let your mind think about really racing until 22 miles in the marathon. Remember, what you are doing is not something new to you. You’ve done this time and time again in training. The race is simply a fun long run with a bunch of other folks along a route with crowds cheering for you. Don’t over think things. Just let your body do what it’s trained to do. (Get out of your own way!)

Relax in the beginning and get ready to run fast like in your fast finish long runs. Run strong from 22 miles in the marathon to the finish just like you have mimicked in practice. There will be plenty of pacing groups so you should be able to find others who are running your pace. Form some friendships and work together.

**Race Fueling:**

There will be plenty of fluids on the course. You’ve had plenty of time to work out your nutrition/hydration strategy for the race. During the race, simply implement it. I’m a big fan of carrying your own fluids for the race. That’s what I do and recommend.

Hydration packs are so good now and getting in your preferred nutrition at your own intervals is so important that I say skip the fluid stations and carry your own fluids.

If you don’t carry, then at fluid stations, try to grab a cup as you enter the aid station and another as you exit it. This way, you get two opportunities for fluids since most of the drink gets spilled anyway. Take your time in the aid stations and get your fluids. Think “Sip and Carry” not “Grab and Gulp”. With the paper cups, squeeze the
rim to avoid spilling and for easier drinking through the “spout” formed.

Monitor your hydration as you go. If you start to feel full or ‘sloshy’, skip a station and get the next one. No problem. You know your schedule so just do what’s been working for you. In all of this, you never want to try something new. Just do what’s worked for you. It’s not magic. It’s just doing what you have been trained to do, which is why I like carrying my own fluids.

**Bringin’ it:**

At some point in the marathon (hopefully later rather than sooner), you are going to have to call upon your inner Superman/Superwoman. No matter how well the race is going, you will get tired, your legs will hurt and your brain will be screaming at you to slow down, to back off, to stop this madness. This is perfectly normal, even for the pros, when you are trying to do something special like the marathon.

Runners err when they *hope* this doesn’t occur, when they hope they will feel amazing on race day. The bottom line is that it’s gonna be tough out there. That’s what you signed up for and what all the training you’ve done has been about. So instead of hoping it doesn’t hurt, plan for it too. Wish for it to be a challenge. Ask for it. Don’t be surprised when it happens. Be prepared. You have more strength in you than you ever knew before and you’ll need to be mentally ready to call upon all your strength for the last few miles. Get mentally ready for that battle.

Smile:

Even though I just scared the heck out of you talking about the need for super powers, the last and most important thing to remember about running a marathon is to have FUN! I assume that you run primarily because it’s fun. The race must be as well. Don’t stress about it or get too caught up in it. Just go there to have fun. Smile through the pain as this is what will give you the most satisfaction when you cross the finish line.
“Your body will argue that there is no justifiable reason to continue. Your only recourse is to call on your spirit, which fortunately functions independently of logic.” – Tim Noakes
Post Race – Let’s Celebrate!

You’ll want to celebrate after the race so here are a few tips to make your post-race fun more fun.

1) Runners always think about what they are going to wear to the starting line but rarely what they are going to wear when they finish. Far too often, I’ve seen finishers freezing cold as they walk back to their hotels. If there is a bag drop at the start (where the race will bring your bag to the finish line), remember to include some warm, dry clothes for after the race. If there is no bag drop but friends/family will greet you after the race, give them some warm clothes to bring to you. Believe me, you’ll be so glad you prepared your post-race clothing. Even on warm marathon days, you’ll be surprised at how cold you get once you stop running.

2) While you may want to hit the bar for a celebratory drink, I recommend your first drinks be your recovery drinks. Before leaving for the race start, place two smoothies, shakes or other recovery drinks in the hotel fridge or ice bucket. When you get back to your room after the race, down as much of it as you can. Sometimes your stomach isn’t ready for a meal but these post-race drinks go a long way to helping you recover and be ready for your celebratory drinks. As you unwind, shower and rest, continue to drink as much sports drink as your stomach will tolerate to help rehydrate yourself. As with training, your urine frequency and color will let you know when you’re rehydrated.

3) Also before you head to the starting line, fill your hotel room bathtub up with cold water. Hang the sign on your door to not clean your room (because they may drain the water). Then, when you are back at your room after the race, head to the ice machine and fill a bucket or plastic bag up with ice (may take a few trips). Get in the tub and add the ice. Sit and relax for 15-20 minutes in the ice bath (perfect time to drink your recovery drink) and reflect on your race. This quick ice bath can really help with post-race recovery. You’ll be stiff from the bath when you stand up (you might need some help standing up) but then simply drain the bath, turn on the hot
water and take a nice hot shower. I’m always amazed at how fresh I feel after this ice bath/hot shower combo post-marathon.

4) You need to get some proper food in you so either head to a restaurant very, very close by or order room service (my usual option). I’m usually not interested in a big meal post-marathon so I pick something that will be satisfying and easy to digest. Relax as you eat and keep rehydrating.

5) Now that you are refueled, moving toward recovery with the ice bath/hot shower and cleaned up, REST. I know the inclination is to go celebrate but trust me, rest now and you’ll enjoy your celebration more. I recommend resting for 2-4 hours post-race just to make sure you get refueled and rehydrated properly. You give your muscles time to relax and recover. You may not be able to nap (though if you can, even better!) but I recommend you take some time to just chill out and let the body and mind recover. You just ran a marathon so respect that your body needs some down time before party time.

6) Now that you’ve done #1-5, it’s time to go celebrate. I find that if you give your body a few hours to recover from running 26.2 miles, you can then really enjoy your accomplishment with a good meal and fun time with friends, fellow runners and family. And, doing some light walking around on the evening of the race furthers your recovery and this gentle blood flow helps the muscles recover.
Coach Greg’s Pre-Race Pep Talk

Stop reading. Before you read this section, I need you to be in a quiet space with no distractions. I need you to be in a calm mood with nothing pressing on your mind.

Okay. Ready?

Here is my super secret sauce: The performance you want is already inside you. That’s right. You can already achieve your goal. It is possible. You’ve proven it in training and even if you didn’t have the most ideal training leading in the marathon, you can still run very, very well. I’ve seen it over and over and over.

The key is to just get out of your own way. You are the one putting limits on yourself. Everyone else thinks you are amazing for doing this marathon thing anyway so why not you? Time to be more kind to yourself and become your own cheerleader in the last couple of weeks before the race.

It’s important to realize that you will be the one controlling the dialogue in your head throughout the race so let’s start scripting a positive result. Time to find your mantra to use when times get tough to remind you that you are more than tough enough to handle the challenge. Mine is always, “If it’s to be, it’s up to me!” When I say this, I simply put my head down and get the job done realizing no one else is going to do it for me.

Will you get tired? You bet! Your legs will ache. Your mind will get fuzzy and you’ll just want the thing to be over. But, you must fight. You must keep going just like you did in training runs. Just get to the next mile marker and then the next and so on. I guarantee you that if you can just keeping going the finish line will surrender. It will acknowledge your bravery and toughness and appear before your eyes. And, the more you can be engaged while in the latter miles of the marathon, the sooner the finish will come.
As soon as you start having a pity party (and I’ve had my fair share), you will lose time. My advice is to accept that you are hurting; know that everyone else is hurting too and stop whining about it. I know. That seems harsh but you’re gonna have to dig deep late in the race and if you’ve learned nothing else through this marathon training thing it is that you can dig deep, that there is a strength in you that you never knew existed. Remember that run you gutted out and learned something about yourself. That toughness is still in you and probably even to a greater extent than before.

As fatigue sets in, dig deep. You have it in you and the more determined you are in the last 10K of the marathon, the better your finish time will be and the more proud you will be of yourself – not just at the finish line but for weeks to come.

Imagine looking back at the marathon you are about to run and saying, “Wow! I really did a great job. I’m so proud of myself.” Sounds good, doesn’t it? Well, then let’s commit right here right now that no matter what happens in the marathon, the weather stinks, you get a blister or you feel like a million bucks, you are going to give the absolute best that you have to offer through every part of the race; the beginning (holding back and running smart), the middle (dialing in goal pace and continuing to fuel correctly) and especially the end (where you’ll call upon your superman/superwoman powers). Agreed? Good. Let’s (virtually) shake on it.
Post Script:

Here’s why I’m so confident that every runner has the goal performance inside:

When runners run well, achieving their goal, setting a new PR, qualifying for Boston, to a runner, they still say they could have done four or five things better to run even faster. This shows that even without every star in the galaxy lining up, you can hit your goal. Others do it all the time. It just takes determination.

In fact, just go to a marathon finish line. You will see example after example of ordinary people doing extraordinary things. That’s why I believe in you. That’s why I’m telling you that you got this.

And for a last bit of inspiration, please watch this video of Dick and Ricky Hoyt. Extraordinary is all around us and inside you as well.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Adubrj3yya8
“Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion: The potential for greatness lies within all of us.” – Wilma Rudolph
The High Five & Fist Bump

I thank you for reading this book and for sharing your running with me.

We may not know each other personally but we are connected through the marathon experience and as I mentioned in the beginning, you have another person in your corner as you embark upon the 26.2 mile journey to greatness. I'll be cheering for you.

I wish you the best and will leave you with a quote I learned in high school, which had a profound effect on my running performances.

“To believe in yourself and in what you can do is to take the first step on the road to success.”

Let me know how it goes: coachgreg@mcmillanrunning.com
Frequently Asked Questions of McMillan Coaches

Q: “Should I run even splits, negative splits or positive splits for my marathon?”

A: Generally, even splits or a slight negative split is best. There is a common misconception that you must “bank” time by running the first half drastically faster (positive split) because of a supposed inevitable slow down in the second half. If you are trained properly, then it is possible to run even splits or even a negative split during a marathon. We advise being even or up to 2.5% slower the first half of the marathon than the second half.

Q: “What should I eat the morning of the race and when?”

A: The best answer to this depends on what your stomach tolerates best and what types of those foods will provide optimal fuel for race day. Foods that are easily digestible are ideal. Examples include bananas, bagels and oatmeal. Stay away from processed sugar and too much caffeine and tea, which tend to cause stomach issues. Be sure to eat your last meal pre-marathon at least 2-4 hours before the race in order to give your body time to absorb the nutrients and move the food out of the stomach. Between that meal and the race, you can snack lightly to keep your stomach from becoming hungry. Don’t forget to hydrate well with water and electrolytes. Again, this is something you should work out in practice to find your perfect pre-marathon meal. Don’t experiment with anything new on race day.

Here are some real-world answers from McMillanRunning.com coaches. Note the variety in answers which shows that there is no one universal pre-race meal:

Andrew Middleton – Senior McMillan Running Coach:
3 hours before race: Rice Crispies with Almond Milk, Powerbar, Small cup of coffee and Water/Accelerade
75 minutes before race: Sip on Accelerade and Water; Banana
30 minutes before race: Energy Gel and Water

Ian Torrence – veteran of over 20 marathons (and over 180 ultramarathons):
2 hours before race: Chai tea latte with rice milk and a Clif Bar

Andrew Lemoncello- Olympian and 2:13 marathoner:
4 hours before race: Oatmeal, banana, toast and honey, coffee, water

Katie McGee – Three-Time Olympic Marathon Trials Qualifier:
2 hours before race: Clif or Powerbar and coffee.
Water and Gatorade till race time.

Ben Rosario – Two-time Olympic Trials Qualifier and 2:18 Marathoner:
4 hours before race: big hearty bagel with a touch of peanut butter
Water and a sports drink throughout morning
2 hours before race: energy bar

Emily Harrison – 2:32 Marathoner, US 50K Champion:
2-3 hours before race: 2 pieces of gluten-free toast with jam or oatmeal with peanut butter

Q: “My last training week in the peaking plan includes a hard running session. Do you think this is too much too close to my race?”

A: Many runners think that the Peak Phase equates to a full rest phase. While it is important to back off of training to allow for the storage of extra energy, you don’t want to cause your legs to become heavy. This can occur if you only perform easy running or no running at all. The workouts we list in the final week of training are meant to help sharpen your fitness. If done properly, you should come away from this workout feeling refreshed and excited about the race.

Q: “I bought new shoes this week for my marathon. Can I use them in the race?”
A: You never want to go into a race with an unknown about your gear. If you have not worn this pair of shoes for a long run or workout, you will not know whether your feet tolerate it well. The chance for blisters, soreness and hot spots is increased when you race in shoes that you have not worn before in training. Go with the shoes that you know have served you well in training and there will be less of a chance for a surprise on race day.

Despite this, I will say that we had a camper at one of our Running Getaways and he said he always bought a new pair of shoes at the expo before every one of his marathons. We were shocked but it was just something he liked to do. While I wouldn’t advise this, I will concede that today’s shoes don’t require as much break in time as previous models, so as long as you have a run or two in them and they feel comfortable, you should be good.

Q: What should I eat/drink during the race?

A: That’s the 64 million dollar question isn’t it?! What we know is that for virtually all runners, consuming carbohydrates, electrolytes and water along the course leads to faster times. The trick, of course, is figuring out what amount to drink, the type of fuel and how frequently to ingest it, but that’s what training is for. Use training runs, particularly marathon-preparation long runs to experiment and see what works for you.

While there are exceptions, a good general rule of thumb that I learned from ultra running legend Ian Torrence is to work toward **150-350 calories of carbohydrate per hour** of racing. That equates to **30-60 grams per hour** – the amount in two energy gels or ~24 ounces of sports drink. Speaking of fluids, runners should get **24-32 ounces of fluid per hour containing 400-800 milligrams of sodium**.

All of your fuel and fluid can come from a drink but many runners use a
combination of drinks as well as more concentrated forms of carbohydrates like the popular energy gel. Because taste, texture and digestibility are all very individual, you must experiment in training to find the products and timing that works for you. Most runners don’t fuel enough, which contributes to the slow down at the end of the race. Avoid this by dialing in your plan and then executing it. (And I’ll again suggest that you carry your own fluids so you can get fueled on your schedule.)

Q: “I’m really worried that I will not hit my goal, is there anything I can do this week to better my chances?”

A: Every runner has a moment of self-doubt before a race at some point in his or her running career. But, these thoughts should be tempered by the results of your training cycle. Take a moment and look back at all the training you’ve completed up to this point. Each and every workout listed in your plan is tailored toward giving you the best chance at reaching your goal. Be confident in your fitness and know that you have done what it takes to run your best, whatever time that may be. You should practice this same confident approach during the race, stay positive, be excited about the opportunity to race, and tell your self to give your best effort.

Q: “Should I back off on my strength training?”

A: Yes. As you’ve done with your run training, you want to cut back on the sets and peak your strength training at the same time you peak your running. This doesn’t mean you have to remove it completely if you feel it’s a key part of your running performance but just taper it down slightly as race day approaches.

If you’re accustomed to more dynamic strength training like plyometrics, you should focus on your plyometrics over the last two weeks and cut back on the heavy strength work.

Q: “Am I tapering too much/little?”
A: You’ve probably practiced mini tapers during the training with tune up races so you know a little reduction in training works. What’s interesting is that your mind will be playing tricks on you at this point because it’s so used to getting the regular endorphin rush from the hard workouts that you’ve scaled back on. Trust the Peak!

Q: “Why do I feel so crummy?”

A: It is not uncommon to feel a little crummy on a few runs in the peaking phase. Some of this is the reduction in training volume as your body begins to rest and some of it is psychological as you become hypersensitive to how you feel. You must change your thinking. Realize that this is normal and that your muscles are healing and getting stronger with the reduced workload so that they will be in peak condition on race day. This is called Supercompensation. It means that by peaking in the way we’re describing, your body actually builds to a higher fitness level than before. You not only get fitter but you get super fit.

Q: Any advice for the portajohn lines?

A: I was on a bus with my friend who was running his first long race. It wasn’t quite a marathon but it did climb up and over 13,000 foot pass. We were being bused to the start, which took about an hour. As we entered the town where the start was held, I leaned over and said, “I’m going to tell you a little secret.” “As you approach the starting area of a race, you need to have a bathroom eagle eye because as soon as this bus unloads, everyone is going to be dashing to the portajohns. And, there are already several hundred more runners who are trying to do the same thing.

My secret is that as I approach the starting area, I look for coffee shops and construction sites, preferably just out of sight of the starting line. Once I get off the bus, I head straight to the coffee shop or construction site because they typically have a bathroom (or portajohn) and there won’t be a line. Works nearly every time,”
I told him. Sure enough, as the bus pulled into the starting town, I spotted a house that was being remodeled 4-5 blocks from the starting corral area. I knew there would be a portajohn at the site (they are usually required by law at construction sites) and simply got off the bus and headed straight there. No hassle. No stress.

Q: I can't sleep well before key races so I'm worried I won't get good sleep the night before the marathon. Thoughts?

A: Most runners, even wily veterans, have trouble sleeping. I, myself, never sleep well and wake up every hour or two worried that I’m going to miss my alarm. It stinks because you’d prefer better sleep but the bottom line is that one night of poor sleep won’t hurt your performance (and there’s even some that suggest this restless night keeps your body more “on” and ready for a big performance on race morning).

So, worry less about the night before but make sure the night before the night before is good.

Q: What if I oversleep and miss the race?

A: It won’t happen. You’ll be too nervous and probably won’t sleep well anyway. But, if you’re like me, you want some security so my advice is to set multiple alarms. I set two alarms on my phone and if I’m really worried, I even set the hotel rooms alarm clock. One final option for those staying in hotels is to schedule a wake up call with the hotel. So, you won’t oversleep. Not only will you be too wired but you’ll have plenty of back up.

Q: I heard you like to pack trash bags for marathon morning. What’s that about?

A: One of the easiest and more versatile items you can pack in your race bag is a trash bag (or two). First, if the ground is damp or muddy, you can sit or lay on the trash bag to rest before the race. You can use it while changing clothes or to wrap
over your shoes to keep them from getting wet/muddy before the race. Second, if you get cold or it rains before a race, you can just tear a neck hole and (optional) arm holes and wear it as a poncho. Once the race starts and you no longer need it, you can toss it in the trash and not worry about throwing away some nicer like a poncho or rain jacket.

I coached a charity marathon group for the Honolulu Marathon one year. Race morning was met with a steady down pour. Our group had to walk a half-mile or so to get to the starting area (and then stand there till race time). I noticed that the hotel had some taller trash cans so I simply asked the hotel custodian if I could borrow a few trash bags. He obliged and I was about to outfit our crew with knee length trash bag ponchos. And, if you can find ones that are as long as you are then you can also lessen the rain on your feet.

The last (and at times the most important) use for the trash bag is as your personal portajohn. While it’s preferable to use a proper toilet (and we can agree that there are many, many important reasons to do so), there are times when you just can’t wait. Most men just find a bush or tree whereas ladies have to be more discrete when urinating. If, however, you have a longish trash bag, you can find an appropriate place and squat down to make your own trash bag tent/portajohn. (And, I’m talking going #1 here people. #2 requires a proper toilet/portajohn.)

Q: The race offers massage before the race. Should I get one?

A: Your body is a well-tuned machine by marathon weekend so my advice is to avoid any new bodywork. Don’t get a massage from someone who hasn’t worked with you before. Don’t test out every new therapy being promoted at the expo. Don’t do anything that can upset your peaked condition.

And, if you have a nagging injury, you need to be very careful. On the one hand, it would be wonderful to find a miracle cure but we know that’s very, very unlikely.
And, getting too much work done (either by someone else or even yourself) is a sure way to keep the injury fired up. Be smart and do as little as possible to take your body out of it’s peaked state.

I once coached a runner who was in great shape for his race. His hotel had a nice hot tub so he thought a soak would be good leading into the marathon. The problem was that he didn’t take a quick soak (10-15 minutes), he stayed in for over 3 hours! As you might guess, he ran very poorly as his legs were rubber from all of the time in the hot tub.

Q: Should I run with a pace group?

A: Pace groups are hit and miss, unfortunately. At times, the pacer hits splits perfectly and runs the race smoothly whereas other times, the pacer is very erratic and it ends up more stressful than helpful. So, there’s nothing wrong with starting with a pace group to help reduce the stress and save some valuable physical and mental energy for the later stages of the race, but ultimately you to be the one in charge of your own pace. If the group is doing a good job, great, stick with them. But if they’re too fast or too slow you have to be aware, listen to your body and trust your instincts to be ready to do your own thing.

Many races have a chance for runners to meet with pacers before the race. If so, do it and ask two important questions. Have they paced a marathon before? What is their best marathon time? If they haven’t paced before, then be very attentive and ready to do your own thing. And beware if they have a marathon best that is very, very much faster than your goal time.
Bonus Content

What Wall?

Fatigue in the marathon can be so severe that it’s like running into a wall. That’s how sudden and extreme the slow down is. It’s no surprise then that the legend of the “wall” strikes fear into all marathoners. It’s scary. So, let’s talk about the wall, what it is and how to avoid it.

This type of fatigue where your body suddenly and dramatically slows down is the perfect storm of several factors. Depending on the individual situation, some factors may play a larger role in hitting the wall than others but in all cases the result is the same – you slow way down and will likely never see your goal pace again. It will be a slow and painful walk or, at best, walk/run to the finish. You will no longer care about your time. You will only want the agony to be over.

The Wall Defined

Experts believe the wall is related to a few factors:

First, your muscles have been contracting and relaxing over and over and over again for many, many miles. The mechanism that produces those contractions simply fatigues.

Second, the muscle fibers themselves can become damaged from the stress of running. Once damaged, muscle contractions simply can’t occur correctly. The structural elements are compromised. Ever see those runners running awkwardly at the end of the marathon as they try to get fatigued and damaged muscles to work correctly?
Aside from problems with the physical structure and function of the muscles themselves, the wall is also related to your energy stores. You burn fat and carbohydrates when you run a marathon. Inside your muscles, you have a sufficient store of fat but a limited store of carbohydrate. This intramuscular carbohydrate store is called muscle glycogen. In a nutshell if these glycogen stores get too low, your pace must slow so you don’t run the tank dry. Think of it like when you are on the freeway and you notice your fuel light is on and you aren’t quite sure you can make it to the next fueling station. You slow down to preserve fuel. Same thing happens in response to dropping glycogen stores, you are forced to slow down so you aren’t burning carbohydrates at such a high rate.

Another factor is your blood glucose (or sugar) level. You probably know that the body has a very tight range for blood glucose levels and a very intricate system for keeping the amount just right. If the blood glucose gets low (which can happen after running for over two hours), the brain (which uses blood glucose for energy) will start to reduce blood sugar use in other tissues (i.e., the working muscles) in order to make sure you have enough for brain function. It is obviously a good strategy for staying alive but the result is that your pace slows down.

In addition to the physical causes of the wall, the brain plays a large role in the radical slow down when hitting the wall. First, all humans can become mentally fatigued. This can happen with or without physical exertion. Think how fatigued you can be with long air travel even though all you are doing is sitting. In a marathon, your brain can simply get fatigued from the duration of the effort and the worry and the expectation of the “big day”. It’s just too much for too long and this mental fatigue will result in a slowing of your pace.

Another very interesting factor has been called the “central governor.” Similar to how stability control systems work in a car, the central governor model suggests that the brain is receiving constant feedback from the body. If the brain senses that something is too threatening (e.g., glycogen stores are dropping too quickly), it will
subconsciously reduce your muscular output and slow your pace. This works just like the computer in your car, which increases or decreases power to each wheel and can even engage the brakes when it senses that the car is out of control.

Taken together, it’s a complex interaction between the physical and mental where if the body and/or mind find that things are too far out of control (fatigued contractions, damaged muscle fibers, declining glycogen stores, low blood glucose and/or mental fatigue or subconscious governing of pace), the body and mind cause the experience we call hitting the wall.

How to Avoid the Wall

It’s one thing to know what the wall is but it’s even more important to know how to avoid it. Here are a few strategies that I use to help marathoners avoid the wall.

Training

A key way to avoid the wall is with training. As you prepared over the last 12-20 weeks, you were slowly preparing to tolerate the mental and physical stress of the marathon. Obviously, your weekly training volume and the long run have been the cornerstone of wall-avoidance training but there are two other training opportunities to help you avoid the wall in the marathon.

First, you can challenge your muscle glycogen and blood glucose levels by “training low.” In these runs, you purposely run with low fuel stores, which stimulates your body to 1) preserve the limited glycogen stores by producing more energy from your fat stores, of which you have plenty for the marathon and 2) store more glycogen after the run so that you have a larger and more full tank for future runs and most importantly, the marathon.
After you’ve used fueling to build the distance of your long runs to two hours or more, you slowly begin to wean yourself off of carbohydrates. You start by reducing the carbohydrates you take during your long runs (fewer gels, less sports drink) till you are running carb-free. Then, you avoid a high carbohydrate meal the night before a long run. Next, you begin to avoid breakfast before long runs. You can check out the Lessons on Fueling for Runners article on the McMillan Running website for complete details on how to “train low” to help you avoid the wall. There are some important considerations and special instructions on how to do it correctly so read this article carefully before you try low/no carb training but it’s a concept you might consider for your next marathon training cycle.

Second, you can improve the durability in your running muscles. Muscle damage is high in the marathon. It’s no surprise, as the average marathoner will take over 39,000 strides in the marathon! If you’ve ever seen runners hobbling around for a few days after the race, you’ve seen the proof.

In my opinion, the absolute best way to increase the fatigue resistance in your legs is by running downhill. Downhill running exaggerates the running motion, putting more eccentric stress (muscles lengthening while contracting) on the muscles, which helps them grow stronger and more resistant to fiber damage. You have to be careful, though, and implement downhill training very, very gradually (since it’s higher stress than flat running). But, over a few weeks, you can significantly improve your ability to avoid muscle damage in the marathon.

There are three easy ways to implement downhill running before your next marathon. First, you can begin to increase the pace slightly on downhills on your normal runs. Don’t go crazy with the pace but lift it to marathon pace or slightly faster. Done over a few months, your legs will grow resistant to the type of damage the marathon causes.
Second, you can do some of your key workouts on downhill courses. For example, if you are doing a 4-mile Tempo Run, you can choose a route such that the last 1-2 miles are on a gentle downhill. This will give you exposure to even faster downhill running than the first strategy and help build fatigue resistance in your legs. I highly recommend this strategy for runners whose marathon will be on a downhill course like the Boston Marathon.

The last strategy is to do downhill repeats. As the name suggests, you simply find a very gently sloped downhill and run down strongly then jog back up before running downhill again. These can be very stressful since the downhill running is frequent and often more severe than the first two strategies. I typically advise this only for runners who are running a marathon course that is steeply downhill. As with the low glycogen training, this may be a strategy to consider for your next marathon training program. Just make sure you include a healthy dose of commonsense when you try it.

**Optimizing Pre-Race Carbohydrate Stores**

Another strategy to avoid the wall is to make sure your glycogen stores are full before starting the race. At one time, there was a lot of talk about “carbo loading,” but what we know now is that as long as your diet has adequate carbohydrates, your stores will be fully stocked for race day. There is no need to significantly increase the amount of carbohydrates in your diet at the expense of fats and protein. A slight increase in carbohydrates is all you need.

With your reduction in training volume (the tapering of mileage), your muscles will be burning less carbohydrate anyway so your normal diet should fully stock your stores. If you are worried about this, then a slight increase in carbohydrate is fine, particularly for athletes who are on a reduced carbohydrate diet (i.e., paleo, etc.). For most of us though, we can relax and just eat the foods we like and we know work well for us on race day.
Proper Pacing

It could be argued that the primary reason for hitting the wall is poor pacing. If your pace is simply too fast for the muscles to tolerate for the duration of the marathon or if the pace burns too much of your limited glycogen stores, then the wall is inevitable. Likewise, if your pace is too fast and your mind gets concerned (consciously with worry about the ability to accomplish your goal or subconsciously with the central governor sensing things will go awry if the pace continues), then the wall is inevitable.

So, one of your best defenses against the wall is proper pacing. I use three methods for determining an athlete’s best race pace for the marathon. As I write in my 3 Great Marathon Predictor Workouts article, I use the result of a recent long race plus the pace you can achieve for the last half of a fast finish long run plus the results of a Yasso 800 workout. I suggest you click here to read the article and learn about these 3 predictors of marathon pace.

As an example, let’s say we have a runner with the goal of running 3:45 (8:35 pace) for the marathon. In a recent fast finish long run, our runner averaged 8:32 minutes per mile for the last half of a recent fast finish long run. And, let’s say this runner averaged 0:03:42 for 10 Yasso 800s, which predicts a 3:42:00 marathon (8:28 pace).

Once I have a pace (or pace range) from the fast finish long run and the Yasso 800s (8:28-8:32 for our example runner), I put the result of a recent long race (i.e., anything lasting longer than one hour) into the McMillan Running Calculator. Let’s say our runner just ran 1:46:37 (8:08 pace) for a half-marathon.

The 1:46:37 half-marathon predicts a 3:44:23 (8:34 pace) marathon. The fast finish long run predicts a 3:43:34 (8:32 pace) and the Yasso 800s predicts a 3:42:00 (8:28). In this case, I would feel good that the runner has a great chance of running
the goal time of 3:45 (8:35 pace) so I’d suggest that we are right on target for the goal.

If I had to rank or weight these predictors, I’d say the prediction from the long race is the most predictive (assuming normal conditions, similar terrain to the marathon), the fast finish long run result second and the Yasso 800s third.

Once the runner and I feel good about the possible pace, I simply use the split chart from earlier in the book to provide a pace range for the first half of the race (using a 0-2.5% for a negative split course).

The point of showing you the method I use with athletes is to communicate that you can’t just pick a goal pace out of the sky. You must have some reasonable indication that you can hold it for the marathon. This significantly reduces your risk of hitting the wall.

Of course, once you get race pace determined, you may need to adjust it based on race day weather. If it is hot and/or humid, you’ll need to slow down. The body is like a furnace when we exercise, creating lots of heat that must be dissipated. We do this primarily through evaporation of sweat. But, if the temperatures are hot and/or humid, your sweat mechanism gets overwhelmed. I created a Heat Adjustment Calculator that you can use to know how much to adjust your pace based on various conditions. The bottom line is that, again, if you want to avoid the wall, you need to pick a race pace that is reasonable given your fitness and the conditions.

**Run Smooth**

Tied in with proper pacing is how you actually run your pace. If you’ve ever joined a pace group and found that, even though the pacer was hitting the splits on target, he was very herky-jerky in how he did it, you know that this is not ideal and creates a lot of mental stress and burns a lot more energy than if you run smoothly. The goal
is to dial in your race pace and then cruise along running as smoothly and gently as you can. Try to put no undue pressure on your legs. Run over the ground, not through it. Light and fresh is a great mantra for just gliding along.

**Race Fueling**

It would be wonderful if we didn't need to fuel during a marathon. But, we must and I believe that many of us simply aren't fueling enough and that’s why despite great training and smart pacing we still hit the wall.

McMillan Ultra Coach Ian Torrence is a master at fueling. He should be. He's completed over 20 marathons and even as a masters runner, he continues to run sub 3 on challenging courses like Boston. Plus, he’s run over 180 ultra marathons. As was mentioned in the FAQ section, he suggests we need 30-60 grams of carbohydrate every hour during the marathon. That’s 1.5 – 3 gels per hour or a combination of sports drink and more concentrated carbs like gels or blocks.

You should check out his Lessons on Fueling for Runners article on the website for complete details on how to fuel in the marathon.

Once you know your fueling goals, it is critical that you practice and refine them in training. And you can’t just fuel on long, easy runs and think you will be good to go on race day. You need to practice fueling on long, hard runs and/or long races. This is the only way to know how your body will react to your fueling plan in race-like conditions. Because as we all know, your body can react very differently on race day than it does in training.

Talk to 100 marathoners and you'll get 100 different fueling methods so it all comes down to personal taste, literally. I've worked with runners who can just use gels and water throughout the race. Others can’t stand the taste and texture of gels so they use concentrated sports drink and water. It doesn't matter what you use as long as
you are getting in the fuel you need. With a bit of experimentation, you’ll find the products and frequency that work for you.

One last thing worth mentioning: You need to fuel early and consistently. Once your body gets behind on its fueling, it’s very difficult if not impossible to “catch up.” And, fueling early is more tolerable on your digestive system. As Ian discusses in his Lessons on Fueling for Runners article, absorption in the GI tract changes across the race and requires more dilute fueling later in the race. So, fuel early when your gut is happy and dilute your fuel later in the race to avoid late race nausea.

I mentioned it before and I’ll say it again, carrying your own fluids during the marathon is a great idea. The pros get to put their special fluid bottles every 5K and can tell the race volunteers which bottle with which concoction goes at each specific 5K. Then, they can grab their bottles (no trying to drink out of cups for them!) and sip and carry. We should follow their lead.

Hydration packs and carriers are very comfortable now and offer plenty of options for every runner – from one larger bottle to several smaller ones. The extra weight is a non-issue as the bottle(s) will be getting lighter as the race progresses and may even keep you from going out too fast the first few miles. And, if you are going to be out there for a while, just choose a pack option with several smaller bottles. You can always refill your bottle at later aid stations. Just remove the cap as you are entering the aid station and grab water and/or sports drink and refill your bottle(s). It’s easier to do on the run than trying to drink from the cups. Then, you can recap your bottle and sip away as you continue along the course.

With your own fluids, you can cruise through aid stations while avoiding the traffic jams and you can fuel on your perfected pattern.

Mental Trickery
The final way to avoid the wall is through mental trickery. As was discussed earlier, the wall is often influenced by the conscious and subconscious mind. While it’s harder to influence the subconscious central governor, there are several strategies that keep the conscious mind soothed and the wall at bay.

First, you must accept that it’s going to get very, very hard and that’s normal. Just this simple recognition can help avoid the slow down that is caused by your conscious mind when it senses worry and panic. If you keep telling yourself this is normal then your mind won’t react as strongly and the dialogue in your head will be more positive and less threatening.

Think of the fatigue curve in the marathon. For the first 10 miles or so, the pace is easy and fatigue is low. Then, in the middle and till around 18-22 miles, fatigue starts to set in and increase and by the last 3-6 miles, fatigue is very high. It’s an exponential curve. It is critical that your mental intensity must match this curve.

You can disassociate in the first 10 miles. Enjoy the scenery. Connect with others running at your same pace and just let the miles roll by. In the middle of the race, however, you must begin to engage. You must become more attentive because fatigue is starting to increase. You must match this gentle rise in fatigue. You don’t need all your resources yet but you definitely need to stop the sightseeing and start focusing on the task at hand. As you get to 20 miles and the final push toward the finish, you must really engage. You must match the sharp rise in fatigue with a sharp rise in mental engagement.

If you can match the fatigue curve with your mental intensity, then the mind gets on board and feels less threatened. If, however, you expect it to feel easy, then the mind will sense this discrepancy between your expected fatigue (low) and your actual fatigue (rising higher and higher). This causes concern and kicks in the conscious factors that can bring on the wall.
Second (and it may sound silly), smile. When it starts to get hard, smile. There is a lot of research that shows that even a forced smile can create positive changes in your mental outlook. I remember when I won the Masters Trail Marathon National Championships. I went into the race expecting it to be hard, after all, the first 8 miles climbed continually up to over 5,000 feet in elevation. But, I told myself before the race that I was going to really enjoy this marathon. I was going to “smile through the pain.” And, it worked. Every time, it got hard. I forced a smile. I thought about how much I loved running and how I chose to put myself in this position. I thought, “This is exactly what I wanted. It’s supposed to be getting harder and harder and I like it.” Give smiling through the pain a try.

Ultimately, if you can just keep running, moving forward using any and all mental tricks in your arsenal, the finish line will come. I promise that they won’t move it on you. It will be there waiting for you. Just keep pushing.
Resources and Recommended Reading

_You (Only Faster): Training plans to help you train smarter and run faster_

McMillanRunning.com

Don't Taper. Peak!
About the Author

Greg McMillan has been called, “One of the best and smartest distance coaches in America” by Amby Burfoot of Runner’s World magazine. Through his website www.mcmillanrunning.com he offers training tools, training plans and personal coaching for new runners, BQ seekers and Olympic level athletes. He lives with his wife and son in Encinitas, California.