

Marathon Training Philosophy and Training Plan Overview:

This document provides an overview of the training philosophy and explain the four phases in marathon training and the objectives of each phase of the plans that have been provided to you. Both the “First Timer Marathoner”, and, “Experienced Marathoner” training plans follow the philosophy endorsed by Road Runners Club of America (RRCA), using the principles of **Overload/Recovery, and Specificity**.

So, What does this mean?

Take a look at either of the two 22-week marathon plans, they are structured into a series of short weekly runs, Rest or cross-training days and the weekend “Long Run”. With each successive run you will **Overload** or stress your leg muscles, your breathing & energy systems, and then, you will **Recover** either by running a very easy short run or by Resting from running.

Furthermore, as the weekend Long Run distance builds over successive weeks, you will progressively **Overload** your body and then **Recover** with a well-deserved Rest day. Notice also that as the training progresses, the weekly runs slowly build in distance over time, providing a further stress to your body.

By taking time to **Recover** properly after each stress, your body will slowly adapt to these stresses. In fact it is during the recovery days that you actually grow stronger. Over time, your body adapts to the stress of running and you will become more efficient at running. More detail will be provide on this later in your training.

Critically important to your training success is the Recovery time. Running too often, too many miles and too fast especially during the first 10–13 weeks during the **Base Building Phase**, will wear you out and it will significantly increase your risk of a running injury. This is a big mistake made by may runners and can lead to having to drop out of training.

The training plans are structures so that **Fridays** are “Rest Days” to recover from all stresses of the weekly runs and most importantly to prepare your body for the Hardest workout of the week - the “**Long Run**” on Saturday. (Note: *if you prefer to do the Long Run on Sunday, then shift the training plan one day and have Saturday and Monday be the Rest Days*).

Specificity Training:

The term “**Specificity Training**” can be explained using the following examples:

- the best way to train your body to be capable of cycling 100+ miles is to practice cycling a lot. Long periods of time on the bike, trains your body to be able to sit & ride for a very long time.
- to train your body to be capable and comfortable with running 26.2 miles you need to practice running. Consider that most runners will need to be on their feet for between 3.5 to 5+ hours to finish a marathon. Therefore, you are going to steadily train your body over 22 weeks to be capable of running for a long period of time - How? - by, running lots of miles. Note: most if not all miles should be run at easy pace – more on this topic later.

Cross-Training:

While running lots of miles at an easy pace will be your primary focus, this does not mean cross-training is not important. Some days are designated as cross-training days, typically this involves spending time to do core exercise work, stretching, swimming, cycling and even speed work, to develop other muscles groups that supports your running muscles. Recommendations for cross-training days/activities will be detailed as your training progresses.

Your #1 priority and the key to **Specificity Training** to develop your ability to complete a Marathon is: 1) the Long Run and, 2) running lots of training miles.

Review the training plan again and notice that the “Long Run” distance increases by no more than about 10 % each week and, also the mid-week miles build slowly over time. This is done purposefully to limit the increase in stress or Overload to your body, so that your body can adapt.

Periodically, as the training weeks go by, notice there is an additional **Recovery** period to the Long Run distance, this is referred to as a **Long Run “Cut Back” Week**.

Once again this is purposely done to help your body recover and allow it to further adapt to the steady increase in stress level over the previous 3 to 4 weeks, and most importantly allows your body to get ready for the next Overload Cycle, where running distances will continue to be increased.

Marathon Training Phases:

There are four training phases in your 22-week training plan:

- Base Building Phase
- Sharpening Phase
- Taper Phase
- Recovery Phase

“Base Building Phase”: involves the first 13 weeks of training. The objective of this phase is to slowly develop your endurance level and to improve your running economy. All runs, no matter which plan you follow, should be done at an easy or conversational pace. To reduce your risk of injury, it is important to focus on running slowly and focus on building running volume and not running intensity during this phase of your training.

More details on the topic of running slower to runner faster will be present later.

For experienced marathoners following the Intermediate plan, note after 10 weeks of Base Building, Tempo Runs may be introduced into the Tuesday Run (or on Wednesday / if performing Long Run on Sunday). The purpose of this is to start training your body to increase speed. Please note. this is for only a specific portion of the run (not the entire run!).

More detail on Speed Work will be presented in future updates.

Sharpening Phase: The second phase of the training program (weeks 14 to 19) is the Sharpening Phase where you will continue to adapt your body for even longer endurance runs. This is the phase where the two plans will diverge, typically with respect to three things: i) total weekly miles, ii) mid-week run distances, and, most importantly, iii) the types of work outs completed during the weekly run(s), for example, Goal Pace, Tempo work, and / or Hill Sprints as a portion of the run.

First Time Marathoners: Please note, you will totally focus on easy runs to continue to build the Long Run distance and overall total weekly miles. Typically, Tempo and Hill work are not recommended for the first-time marathoner. The reason is to minimize the risk of a running injury. Your bodies will be taxed to adapt to the Long Run alone, there is no need to further stress your body and risk over use injury. Your primary training goal should be to get you to the start line prepared and capable of completing the marathon happy without regard to a specific finishing time.

For **Experienced Marathoners** following either plan, Tempo and Speed work during the Sharpening phase can help with leg turnover and improve your overall speed. These workouts are key to help increase your overall comfort level at maintaining a specific marathon goal pace for the entire 26.2 miles. Hill work also improves leg strength and running economy. The TEMPO, Speed, or Hill workouts are best designed on a personal level with your running coach. Your coach can work with you to modify these workouts to meet your capabilities and race goals. Links to articles that describe these types of works will be provide later.

Note: TEMPO, Speed, or Hill Sprints are considered "Hard" Work-outs and they put significant stress on your leg muscles and breathing. Therefore, it is recommended that these are done on a Tuesday or Wednesday so that your body has had time to: 1) recover from the previous long run, and also, 2) to recover before your next weekend Long Run.

"Taper" Phase: the third phase in the plan, occurs during the last three weeks before the actual Marathon date. Note how both, the Long Run distance, and, the total weekly miles are decreased significantly by about 35-40% each week.

The objective of the Taper is to:

- allow your body to fully recover from the stresses from all the long weeks of training,
- re-energize your body and
- be ready to peak in effort on Marathon day.

As a side note, by the time you have completed the training leading up to marathon day, hopefully, you will grow to realize that the upcoming "Marathon" is just another "Long Run". You will have practiced this over and over again, so you will know you are Ready and you are going to have a Great Day.

Recovery Phase: involves the 2 weeks after the Marathon. The objective of this period is to relax, embellish in your accomplishment and allow your body to fully mend. Depending on your running history it may take 3 to 4 weeks for your body to mend all the micro-tears in your leg muscles from the marathon. It is recommended to limit long runs to <6 miles for several weeks to allow your body to fully recovers.

Next Update: additional details on the Base Building Phase and the science behind the overload / recovery principle.

Please send me an email if you have any specific questions or if you need some guidance around what training you should consider doing now ahead of the Chicago program start date on May 8th.

Happy Running!

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