



Well it's February already and those of you planning to do a race in April, such as the London marathon, might have realised there are only eight training weeks left. If you've not started training properly yet, it isn't quite panic stations, but it isn't far off! If you're planning something a little later in the year then get training now so you can enjoy your big challenge.

The perfect preparation for a marathon in April is to do a 20 mile training run every week in March plus three other runs per week! This is pretty daunting, especially if you're still wheezing after one lap round the block. However follow my simple training plan and you'll get round any distance from 5km to marathon even if you have to walk a little on longer races.

The plan involves three training runs each week, one long, one short and one middle distance. If you're doing a marathon aim for one extra middle distance run each week to make four training sessions. The long run should start with you going out for an hour (or 45 mins for races up to 10km) and adding five minutes to this each week. Aim to jog slowly and don't worry about how far you go or if you need to take walking breaks, just get used to spending longer periods on your feet.

The middle distance run should be a distance you can run non-stop, but the speed is unimportant. For a marathon this should peak at 8-10 miles, but you may start at as little as 3-4 miles or a couple of miles for shorter races. If you find you can't jog 3 miles non-stop then a marathon may be a little ambitious unless it is more than 12 weeks away. Aim to add half a mile to this run each week, or if marathon training to one of your two middle distance runs each week, alternating which one you add the half mile to.

Short runs should be interval training and involve running 1km (one mile for marathon runners) as fast as you can sustain, followed by three minutes of gentle jogging/walking to recover. Repeat this until you have run three repetitions of 1km quickly. Every two weeks add one fast repetition up to a maximum of six. This session is hard work, but it helps you run faster and cope with the physical exertion of race. It is also a good idea to make sure you have a day off training after this session.

The plan will help you get round if all goes well, but if it doesn't, you need to be sensible. If you pick up an injury or a virus and your race is in April, then it's wise to skip the race and find something later in the year. If you're running the London Marathon they even encourage you to defer until next year if you're unwell because running a marathon when under-prepared or ill is dangerous. Make sure you ease off training for two weeks before a marathon and a week for other distances so your body recovers and is ready for the big day. This will help you to run your best and most importantly enjoy it.

If you have longer to prepare, follow the plan but stop increasing distances and just aim to run faster once your long run reaches  $\frac{3}{4}$  of race distance, your middle-distance runs are two-thirds and you can manage six fast repetitions. This training schedule has helped lots of my clients succeed from 5km to marathons and from 'just getting round' to 'keeping up with the Kenyans' performances!