



# Endurance Sports Training

## **Marathon Training Program Explanation** **By Ben Wisbey**

### **Who is the Program is Aimed At?**

This marathon training program is intended for those runners who are aiming to complete a marathon in several months time. It is expected that you are able to currently run 21km at a comfortable pace. It is expected that you have a solid base in which to build your marathon preparation upon.

The program is set out so that the maximum amount of time spent training in any single week is 75 kilometres, and this will be your biggest weeks.

It is important to remember that the marathon is a big commitment and requires time, motivation and patience. However it is also important to remember that a session missed here or there will not effect your overall performance.

The increased training volume will place demands on your body that you are not used to coping with. It is therefore important to monitor your body through resting heart rate, rapid body weight changes, levels of fatigue, levels of motivation, as well as thirst and sleeping patterns. If you feel as though you are overtraining, ill or simply not coping with the training load, schedule in a rest day or two.

### **Starting dates**

The programmed outlined is a 12 week program. Those runners training for the Melbourne Marathon should start the program on Monday July 23<sup>rd</sup>, while those intending to run the Sydney Marathon, start the program on Monday August 6<sup>th</sup>.

### **All runs Should Include Warm Up and Cool Down**

Warm-up for at least 10-12 minutes and cool down for at least 10 minutes. This should be a jog at very low intensity. During the latter part of the warm up you should complete some drills as a form of dynamic stretching; these include high knees, butt kicks, bounding and short stride outs.

Each session outlined includes time for the warm up and cooldown period of the run. These periods are extremely important to allow maximum benefit from your session, and to enable you to recovery more quickly for your next session.

### **Training Types**

### Recovery Runs

Recovery runs are just that, they are used as an active form of recovery. They should be done at a low intensity over flat natural terrain. Don't worry about the pace of these runs, they should only ever be nice and easy, even when you are feeling fresh and ready to go.

### Medium Long Runs

Medium long runs are what you are going to use as your longish mid-week aerobic run. They are similar to long runs in terms of desired running pace. They should also be done over hilly courses.

### Long Runs

Long runs are the key to your marathon success. The marathon is an event that is conducted over a long duration, at a low intensity. Your long runs should be done over a hilly course and include a combination of soft and hard surfaces. As the event comes closer gradually start making your long runs less hilly and run a greater portion of them on hard terrain, so that you get used to running on the road.

You should conduct your long run at a moderate intensity. The desired pace for your long runs is about 30-40 seconds slower than marathon pace.

These runs are a great time to run with a training group.

### Aerobic Runs

Aerobic runs are similar to medium long runs in terms of intensity, however the duration is shorter. These runs are never the primary focus of the week and should be used to generate a smaller amount of training load. They are not as easy as a recovery runs but not as demanding as a medium long run.

Aerobic runs are often coupled with strides, so that the majority of the run is of moderate aerobic intensity with strides interspersed throughout.

### Strides

Strides are used to enhance your neuromuscular running performance. They should be done throughout the session at about 5km race pace with several minutes of aerobic running between each. Be sure to do them on flat terrain, such as an oval.

### Downhill Strides

Downhill strides are very similar to strides except they are done on a slight downhill. Be sure to do them on a smooth soft surface for safety reasons. These strides should be done at near maximal speed in order to enhance both running technique and stress your muscles eccentrically. Eccentric muscle contractions are when the muscle is lengthening as it contracts; this is the type of contraction you experience when downhill running, over-speed training, or at the end of a long event.

### Anaerobic Threshold Runs

Anaerobic threshold runs are used to boost your anaerobic threshold, allowing increased speed to be maintained, as well as reducing muscular fatigue at your desired marathon pace. The intervals in these sessions should be conducted on a flat course, such as a track or oval, and should only be started after a thorough warm up has been

completed. The efforts should be done at about 10-15km race pace and a steady pace should be maintained. The recovery periods between intervals should be an easy jog.

### Strength Endurance Runs

Due to the length and nature of marathon running, one of the key aspects on lasting the distance and remaining fatigue resistant for as long as possible is strength. The best method of developing strength endurance is through hill efforts- this is also a great method of increasing running economy.

The hill efforts should be done on a long hill of moderate grade and the intensity should equate to firm/hard. Attempt to maintain relatively long strides on the ascent as this will foster a greater improvement in strength. Once you reach the completion of the uphill effort, simply turn and jog back down before immediately starting your next effort.

On the days that require a tempo period prior to the hill efforts, simply add in a flat tempo period at a firm intensity, which equates to about 10km race pace. Attempt to get to the bottom of the hill at the completion of your tempo period, so you are able to immediately start your first hill effort.

You should find strength training very beneficial to your marathon preparation.

### Marathon Pace Runs

Marathon pace runs are a dress rehearsal for the real thing. These sessions should include a good warm up and cool down, with the middle portion of the run being conducted at marathon pace. These runs should be treated similar to the actual event, with a couple of easy days leading into the session. The session should be completed on a course similar to that of race day (eg. hills, hard surfaces etc.) and the equipment you are going to wear on race day should be used, including shoes, clothing, drinks, food and energy gels. Focus on these sessions and ensure that everything is progressing well, however never be disheartened if it doesn't come together for you during these sessions as there is always plenty of time to learn and adjust in order to improve for the real event.

### Tempo Runs

Tempo runs are used to prepare your body to run at your desired marathon speed. They are longish intervals conducted at marathon pace, and generally done on a hard surface. Recovery between each tempo period should be an easy jog.

### **Stretching**

Attempt to have about 10-15 minutes of stretching at the end of each session. Also put 20-30 minutes aside a couple of times a week to stretch. Stretching can help minimise the chance of injury and fatigue by increasing the suppleness of your muscles.

### **Time vs. Distance**

In the program outlined here, we are using distance as the measure for each run rather than time. The reason for this is that you are training for an event of a specific distance and therefore need to be capable of running the desired distances in training. The other reason is that the program can then be used by runners of all abilities, with all runners achieving the desired distance in each training session. The important

thing to remember is that the distance specified is a guide and does not need to be followed to the metre each day.

### **Strength Training - weights**

Strength training is a form of training that can be of great benefit to any runner. It has been shown to improve technique, reduce muscular fatigue while running, and it can even help in the prevention of injuries.

If you wish to add in some strength training to your program, start by doing 2 sessions per week and with light weight only. Strength training should never detract from your ability to feel fresh and perform well in your running training.

If you would like me information on strength training, Explosive Running by Michael Yessis is a great book offering a wealth of information.

### **Nutrition and other aspects of training**

Nutrition is a very important area for all runners, especially those training for a long event such as the marathon. Due to the high volume of training required nutrition can have major impacts on both your performance and your health.

I would recommend seeing a nutritionist if there are any areas which you believe your diet could benefit.

Another major aspect of marathon training is hydration status. Large volumes of running leads to fluid loss, even in cold conditions, and this fluid needs to be replaced. A good method of monitoring your hydration status is to weight yourself before and after training; each kilogram lost equates to a fluid loss of about 1L. It is essential that this fluid be replaced, as a decrease in body weight of only 2% can cause up to a 10% decrease in running performance. It is essential that you always carry a drink bottle while at work or throughout the day, and continually sip to avoid dehydration.

### **Meeting your individual Goals**

The program outlined here is a generic program that may not fit into your busy schedule. The program can easily be adjusted, simply be sure to have an easy day before your long run, and don't have 2 hard days in row.

You may also wish to address some individual weaknesses that are not addressed in this program, so be sure to use the program as only a guide to your marathon training

If you don't have the time to complete all sessions, simply skip a recovery run here and there to enable your program to fit into your work and social timetable.

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