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HALF MARATHON BEGINNER TRAINING GUIDE



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Introduction

The Half Marathon

The half marathon is not to be taken lightly and is both a serious test of your fitness and your commitment to training. Covering 13.1 miles under your own steam is a tremendous achievement and from beginning your training, to lining up at the start and finishing; preparing for and completing a half marathon is a great experience.

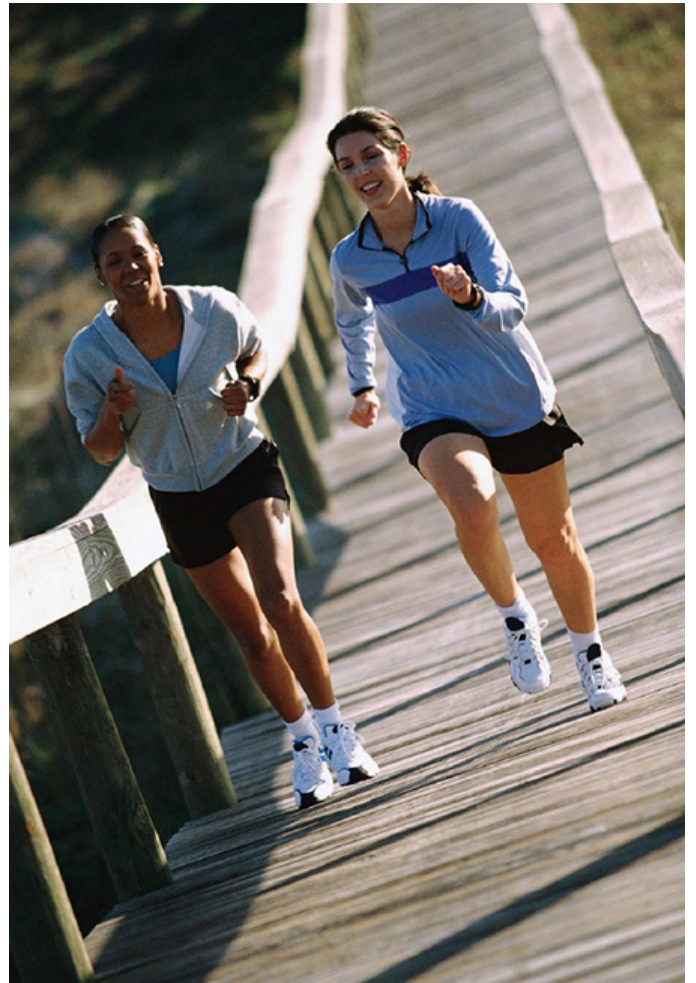
Who is this training guide for?

This training guide is for you if you fall into one of the following categories:

- You are entering your first half marathon.
- You have possibly completed a 5k or 10k event and are looking to move up in distance.

The Half Marathon Beginner Training Guide focuses on everything you need to help you complete your first event, sensible precautions to take and also contains a week-by-week structured program that will turn you into a half marathon runner. This guide includes advice on:

- Training: the dos and don'ts of successful, safe training.
- Kit: what to buy and what to leave on the shelf.
- Footwear: how to choose the right training shoes for you.
- Nutrition: how to correctly fuel your body.
- Hydration: when to drink, so that you don't dehydrate.
- Training guide: a 16-week program to prepare you for your half marathon event.



What happens in a half marathon event?

The half marathon is a hugely rewarding event to compete in. It serves both as an ideal introduction to longer distance running and also a meaningful challenge in its own right. Completing a half marathon is a great achievement wherever you finish in the field and this training guide steps you through to race day and includes a multitude of tips and advice to help you reach your half marathon goal.

If you've never watched or entered an event before, at first sight it appears to be chaotic, with hundreds or even thousands of competitors arriving, warming up and generally preparing. The usual pattern of a race is as follows:

1. **Home.** Before you leave home, make sure you have read all of the pre-race instructions you can get your hands on so that you are as prepared as possible.
2. **Arrival.** Every entrant arrives at the race venue. Most events do not have parking, so it is advisable to use public transport. If you're unsure of this check the information provided by the event organisers or contact them directly. Most races will have a public address system to keep everyone updated as the start time approaches. Many half marathons have vast fields of several thousand runners, catering from elite, world class athletes to beginners entering their first event.
3. **Preparation.** As the race start time gets nearer, competitors will be making final adjustments to their kit, visiting the toilet and warming-up – so that they are fully prepared for their race.
4. **Line up.** Follow the pre-race instructions as to your starting positions, and listen to where the marshals on the day are directing you.
5. **Start.** A gun, klaxon or similar is sounded and the race begins. Unless you are right on the start line, progress will be slightly slower as the runners in front get away – which is often a good thing because you're not tempted to begin too quickly, which can ruin your race.
6. **Main race.** Over the duration of the race there will usually be markers every kilometre, so that you can monitor your pace and frequent a drinks station for re-hydrating. Always take a sip of water even if you don't feel thirsty.
7. **Finish.** The finish line will be clearly marked, usually with a gantry or banner and a time clock. Your timing chip will give you your accurate finishing time, so don't worry about the clock time.
8. **Post Finish.** Runners are grouped into finishing funnels where medals/T-shirts etc are given out (depending on the race) and drinks are also usually available.

Before you begin...

Before you start that first training session, it is important to take a little time out to check a few safety considerations before you commence training. >>>

Safety First

To start with, it is vitally important to ensure that it is safe for you to begin an exercise program. Complete the safety checklist below and if you answer YES to one or more questions, or alternatively, if you are at all concerned about starting training, then make an appointment with your Doctor for a check-up before you start.



Health-status safety checklist

- 1 Are you aged over 30 and/or have not exercised for some time?
- 2 Do you suffer from any medical conditions?
- 3 Are you a smoker or have recently given up smoking?
- 4 Have you undergone any surgery in the past two years?
- 5 Are you suffering from any injuries?
- 6 Are you currently on any prescribed medication?
- 7 Are you unsure about beginning an exercise program?

Y	N
Y	N
Y	N
Y	N
Y	N
Y	N
Y	N

Once you have the all-clear from your doctor then you're ready to start training.

Getting Started

What gear do I need?

To get started you need minimal equipment. Running is a very simple sport and requires very little specialist kit. The most important point is that you have suitable clothing (particularly footwear) and that you feel comfortable in everything. The most technical and most important things you need to buy are your running shoes.

Shoes

Correct footwear is one area where you should not compromise. Good running shoes are an investment in comfort, protection and injury prevention and it is worth visiting a specialist sports footwear retailer rather than a chain store and discussing your requirements with them. A specialist retailer with gait analysis and pressure plate testing will be able to assess your requirements and recommend suitable shoes for your particular gait and running style.



Insight

You want to be comfortable when you run so finding the correct shoe size is very important. When you shop for running shoes, always go in the afternoon because after lunch, your feet will have expanded a little.

Socks

Working upwards from the shoes, next you need some socks. These can be simple sports socks that can be picked up from most sports stores. However, if you get more serious about your running, it is wise to invest in some socks that have been specifically designed for running. These have been designed to wick away moisture and sweat from the foot so you don't slip and consequently suffer from blisters. Additionally, these types of socks are designed with more padding in certain areas for enhanced cushioning.



The most advanced socks are designed for the appropriate foot i.e. they are left and right foot specific. The specific foot socks have a great benefit in that they hug the foot better and there is no excess sock floating around in the shoe which may cause blisters.

Insight

Buy your socks before you buy your shoes. Socks come in a wide range of thicknesses, which can significantly affect the fit of your running shoes. Take the socks that you are going to train in along to the shoe retailer so that you get a perfect match.

Shorts and tights

After socks come shorts or when it is colder, tights. Shorts should be comfortable, lightweight and have the ability to wick away sweat when you train. Shorts come with just elastic waist bands or a draw string as well. It is worth getting a draw string as you can tie the shorts to get the perfect fit.

Elastic-only shorts often move down a little, especially in wet conditions. Your shorts shouldn't be so tight that they cut off circulation round your waist but conversely they shouldn't be so loose that they flap around all the time either.



When the weather is colder it is advisable to wear tights to keep your legs warmer and thus reduce the chance of injury. Running tights hug the legs more efficiently and stop the wind and rain affecting the leg itself. This helps in reducing injuries from cold muscles and also means that you can enjoy running when the weather is a little worse than ideal.

Your tights should be snug fitting and comfortable. It is important to try them on before you buy because many manufacturers have different cuts to suit different styles of runner.

Running tops

Running T-shirts should be reasonably tight but not figure-hugging and likewise they shouldn't flap around when you run in them. It is a fine balance between well fitted and slightly baggy that you should aim for. With long-sleeve T-shirts, you should aim to get ones with cuffed sleeves so they stay down around your wrists. If there are no cuffs then the sleeves often ride up your arms when you run and this can be both annoying and cold.

The mid to top range T-shirts all wick away sweat to keep you cooler and allow a greater air circulation through the fabric. They feel very lightweight but have the properties to keep you warm or cool depending on when and how you wear them. For hot weather singlets are the perfect option, but still go for wicking fabrics that also help air circulate around your body to aid cooling.



When the weather gets really cold or wet it is advisable to run in a long-sleeve waterproof top. These offer excellent wind-stopping and rain-resistance capabilities and can keep you warm and dry throughout any run. Sleeveless jackets are ideal for slightly warmer climates while full long-sleeve waterproofs are better for colder and wetter climates. Cheaper versions will be fine for most running conditions but they will sacrifice certain aspects like being 100% waterproof or windproof. Being prepared for cooler conditions enables you to stay warm, dry and enjoy the run more. In warmer climates wicking fabrics enable you to train harder by staying cooler and wicking away sweat and moisture from the body.

Sunglasses

When you're out running the last thing you want is to have the sun in your eyes the whole time. A good pair of running sunglasses should be comfortable, and should fit you correctly so that they don't bounce around when you pick up the pace. However, they shouldn't be too tight, or you might find that they steam up due to poor ventilation. Finally, you should avoid glass lenses for safety purposes. If you fall or have something hit you in the face the likelihood is that glass will smash – a polycarbonate or composite lens won't.



Hats

Hats are also important in the summer, as you'll definitely want to protect your head from the sun. Your best bet is to go for a lightweight baseball cap, as it's important to feel comfortable while protecting your head at the same time. Too much weight on your head on a hot day is never a good idea.



Winter clothing

In colder temperatures you should wear gloves that are lightweight and comfortable. Only in extreme weather will you need to wear thick running gloves and more often than not you will heat up enough to be okay in the normal thin type. Woollen gloves will be fine for most runners but if you are venturing out into colder or wetter climates, it is worth investing in a more advanced pair. Running with cold hands can ruin the experience for you, so choose carefully when you buy, especially if it is near wintertime. Hats are similar to gloves in that woollen ones are the norm because they are easy to get hold of and are cheap. Fleece materials offer wind-stopping capabilities and some are waterproof as well. Caps offer greater protection from the rain, snow and sun but often they can get blown off in windy conditions.

Sports bras

It is important to wear a sports bra that fits you snugly and gives adequate support for running. Everyone is different and you may well need to try on a few different products before finding what is just right for you.

So does your sports bra fit?

- Your bra should fit snugly without being uncomfortably tight
- The bra should fit without any bulges around the sides
- The shoulder straps should not dig in (wider straps can be more comfortable)
- When you run there should be significantly less bounce than with a normal bra



There are many excellent bras on the market, which come in a large range of sizes and colours offering every different level of support. Most women should only need to wear one sports bra even for high impact activities.

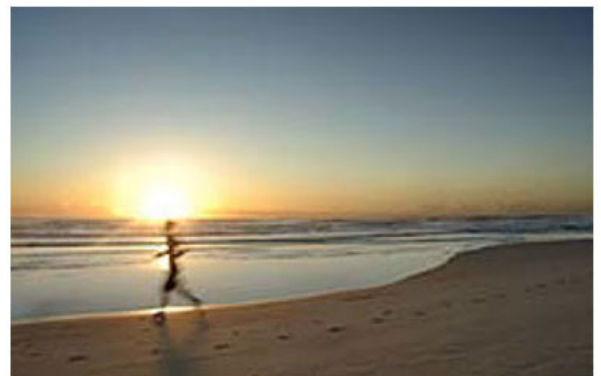
Training

Where to train

With walking, jogging and running, virtually nowhere is out of bounds. From treadmills at the gym to the great outdoors, the possibilities are endless. Some people never venture from the roads whilst others train almost exclusively on paths, trails and in local parks, the choice is yours. A sensible approach is to start locally and then venture further afield as you progress. That way, when building up, you are never far from home. Varying your routes is a must – even the most committed runner tires of following the same circuit session after session, so use your local knowledge to keep your runs fresh.

When to train

From early morning through to lunchtime and late evening, everyone has their favourite time to exercise, and training time flexibility is one of the great plusses with running – you can always train at a time to suit you. Physiologically, early afternoon has been found to be the best time to train; the body is fully woken up and loose and the opportunity to be well fuelled and hydrated is also better. However, if for example midnight is the most suitable fit for your circumstances, there's nothing to stop you training whenever you wish.



Insight

If you train first thing in the morning, as well as a great start to the day, you really boost your metabolic rate (the speed at which your body burns calories). This takes effect during your session and for several hours afterwards, which is a great weight-management strategy.

Principles of training

It is common to think that when a training improvement is made (for example running further or running a faster time over a particular distance), that the improvement has been made at that specific time. In fact that is not the case; the improvement has been made some time previously, following an earlier training session. During the training session, it is the measurable results that are registered in the form of quicker times or further distances. This is because of the way the body responds to training. When exercising, the body is challenged. Following a training session, when the body is at rest, it adapts and gets stronger, and improvements can be measured during a subsequent session. Hence the most important component of any training programme is rest, so that the body is able to adapt to training. Inadequate rest can result in excessive fatigue, loss of motivation and at worst, injury.

Structuring your training sessions

Following correct exercise protocols is key to getting the most out of your training, so that you start out on the road to fitness with safe and correctly balanced training sessions. To get the most out of your training, you should adhere to the following sequence each time you train:

Warm Up

The warm up, raises the heart rate, gets blood flowing to the working muscles and prepares the body for exercise. It should be for a minimum of five minutes and replicate the movements or activities of the main session.

For example: when beginning a run, five minutes very easy jogging will prime the body for the main training session.

Mobility

Some basic actions to put the limbs through the range of movement that the main session requires will ensure that the joints are loosened up, lubricated and will function more efficiently.

Main Session

This will form the bulk of the training session. For example: a brisk 10-minute run.

Cool Down

The cool down should be at a lower intensity than the main session and should bring the body temperature and heart rate closer to pre-exercise levels. Waste by-products of exercise will be flushed from the muscles and tissues, accelerating recovery before the next training session.

For example: the cool-down should be a minimum of five to 10 minutes light CV. Jogging or walking is ideal.

Flexibility

Stretching exercises should be carried out after the main session and cool-down as the body is in a greater state of relaxation than at the beginning of the session. Five to 10 minutes spent stretching the muscles worked will maintain suppleness.



How to Stretch

To get the most out of your post exercise stretching session, simply follow the step-by-step guide below:

Relax

It is very important to be relaxed. Physical and mental tension will inhibit your range of movement and prevent your muscles from stretching as effectively. Hence, you will not achieve maximum flexibility benefits.

Ease into the stretch

Gradually move your body or the limb being stretched into the stretch position. Once you feel slight tension in the muscle, (known as the point of bind), which is the limit of the muscle's flexibility, hold the position. Avoid bouncing or any other movements, which could overstretch the muscle and result in injury.

Relax your breathing

Always keep your breathing easy and relaxed because that will reduce all-round muscular tension, which in turn will allow you to stretch further. Holding your breath will tense up your entire body, making stretching much harder.

Hold for 30 seconds

To get maximum stretching benefits, you need to hold the stretch for a minimum of 30 seconds. Stretching each muscle for just a few seconds brings no flexibility benefits.

Pain means no gain

Stretching should invoke a mild feeling of 'tightness' or tension within the stretched muscle. Pain when stretching indicates injury or a muscle that has been overstretched. Therefore, never stretch beyond a 'comfortable tightness'.

Rest and repeat

A single stretch for each muscle is very beneficial but if time permits, carry out two stretches for each muscle, separated by a short break of 30 seconds. The second stretch will help extend your range of movement further.

Frequency

Ideally stretch the major muscles after every run but if that proves too time-consuming, stretching twice a week is a suitable target..



Nutrition and hydration

Fuelling your training correctly and keeping well hydrated is extremely important and good nutrition will enhance your running experience. Nutrition and hydration are enormous subjects, however, to kick-start your healthy nutrition plan, try and follow the five golden rules below:

Five golden nutrition and hydration rules:

1. **Always eat breakfast**

Your body needs good quality fuel for training and by waking up your metabolism after sleep; you actually burn more calories through the day.

3. **Hydrate**

Drinking water regularly throughout the day is important, but because you are exercising, your fluid requirements will be greater due to sweat losses. However, you will need to focus more on hydration and drinking straight after your workout.

5. **Don't neglect protein**

Include good quality protein in your diet to support rebuilding because your body will need more to match the increased demands that you are placing on your body.

2. **Leave a gap**

Allow 1½ to 2½ hours between your last meal and your training session to allow for digestion. Exercising on a full stomach will not only feel uncomfortable but will also inhibit your performance.

4. **Refuel**

Your energy requirements will increase as your training increases and the optimum time to begin your refuelling is immediately after your workout. Always try and eat something (a banana is great) as soon as possible after your cool-down.

Half Marathon Beginner Training Guide

Program notes

The key to successful training is to build gradually. Everyone progresses at a different rate and your body will take time to adapt to the new demands that you make on it. Hence, it is important not to allow your enthusiasm to over-ride the components of a correctly structured training guide, and to always allow sufficient rest and recovery between sessions. If you are tired and feel like a couple of days off then your body is probably telling you to step back a little. Of course if you feel like missing your run because the weather looks a little suspect then that is a different scenario altogether. Always maintain a balance between, work, family and other commitments and your training so that running enhances your life, not dominates it.

The programme focuses on building your half marathon running specific fitness over 16 weeks so that at the end of the programme you are ready for your event. The programme is progressive but you can jump in at a position that matches your current training load if you are already training.

Insight

Don't be a slave to the guide! The training programme is designed with rest days, recovery sessions and lower volume weeks. This will ensure your body has time to adapt to the training. However, everyone is different and if you feel that an extra day's rest will be beneficial to your training, simply take out one of the shorter sessions in that week.

Training pace guide

Use the pace guide below to monitor the intensity of your training throughout each stage of the 16-week guide.

Type of training run	Intensity index 1=incredibly easy 10= incredibly hard	Description
Super slow	2	Really, really, slow; so easy it hardly seems worth putting your gear on.
Easy jog	3	No pressure, just loosening up or a recovery run.
Jog	4	Still an easy pace but a little faster than an easy jog.
Comfortable	5	You can talk easily to your training partner and keep the pace going.
Steady	6	Even paced run, can chat in short sentences.

Half Marathon Beginner Training Guide

Personal safety is essential - ensure that you consult your doctor before you undertake any new exercise regime.

The half marathon event is not to be taken lightly because it is both a serious test of your fitness and your commitment to training. Covering 21 kilometres under your own steam is a tremendous achievement and from beginning your training, to lining up at the start and finishing; preparing for and completing a half marathon event is a great experience. This training guide is a week-by-week structured program that will progress you as a half marathon runner in 16 weeks.

Week No.1	Getting started (1)	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	10 mins easy jog	
Tues	Rest	2 days of recovery
Wed	Rest	
Thurs	10 mins easy jog	
Fri	Rest	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	Jog / Walk 20 mins	

Week No.2	Getting started (2)	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	Recovery following Sunday's longer session
Tues	10 mins jog	
Wed	Rest	
Thurs	15 mins jog	
Fri	Rest	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	15-20 mins jog	Try to jog continuously

Week No.3	Building (1)	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	15 mins jog	
Wed	Rest	
Thurs	10 mins jog	

Fri	Rest	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	20 mins jog	

Week No.4	Building (2)	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	10 mins taken very easy	First 'back to back' session
Tues	Rest	Double rest following 'back to back' workout
Wed	Rest	
Thurs	20 mins steady	First longer midweek run
Fri	Rest	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	30 mins jog	Starting to increase long weekend run

Week No.5	Building (3)	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	20 minutes easy	
Wed	Rest	
Thurs	20 mins easy	Forget the stopwatch
Fri	Rest	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	35 mins easy	

Week No.6		
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	20 mins easy	
Wed	Rest	
Thurs	30 mins easy	
Fri	Rest	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	40-45 mins very easy pace	

Week No.7	First peak training week	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	20 mins easy/steady	Harder 'back-to-back-session'
Tues	Rest	
Wed	30 mins steady	
Thurs	Rest	
Fri	10 mins easy jog	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	50-55 mins continuous jog/run	Peak week before week 8 taper

Week No.8	Taper and lead-in race	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	20 mins easy	
Wed	Rest	
Thurs	10 mins steady	Easy midweek -taper
Fri	Rest	
Sat	10 mins very easy jog	Very gentle
Sun	5k (3.1 miles) race or time-trial, with jog or warm-up	First race experience

Week No.9	Building phase 2	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	10 mins easy jog recovery run	Recovery jog after yesterday's race
Tues	Rest	
Wed	35 mins steady	
Thurs	Rest	
Fri	35 mins steady	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	65 mins steady	Long runs increase weekly now

Week No.10		
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	

Tues	35 mins easy	
Wed	Rest	
Thurs	45 mins brisk pace	Still able to talk whilst running
Fri	20 mins recovery jog	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	75 mins jog/walk	Jog as much as possible

Week No.11		
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	20 mins easy jog	
Tues	Rest	
Wed	40 mins fast with warm-up and cool-down	Preparation for 10k race next week
Thurs	Rest	
Fri	Rest	
Sat	20 mins jog	
Sun	85 mins easy pace	

Week No.12		
Key week with time-trial or race		
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	20 mins recovery jog	
Tues	Rest	
Wed	55 mins steady	
Thurs	Rest	Start of mini-taper for weekend race
Fri	Rest	
Sat	20 mins very easy jog	
Sun	10k (6.2 miles) race or equivalent time-trial, with warm up and cool-down	

Week No.13		
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	20 mins very easy	
Tues	Rest	

Wed	60 mins brisk	Slightly breathless pace
Thurs	Rest	
Fri	45 mins easy pace	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	Easy 100 min jog	Take walking break if needed

Week No.14	Peak Week	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	50 mins steady	
Wed	Rest	
Thurs	50 mins steady	
Fri	Rest	
Sat	10 mins easy jog	Very, very easy; big run tomorrow
Sun	Minimum 100 mins, aim for 120 mins	Last long training run, taken very easy

Week No.15	Start of taper	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	Rest	
Wed	50 mins steady	
Thurs	35 mins easy	
Fri	Rest	
Sat	15 mins easy jog	
Sun	60 mins comfortable pace	Avoid temptation to do more

Week No.16	Taper week and RACE!	
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	20 mins easy jog	Very easy pace
Tues	Rest	
Wed	40 mins comfortable	
Thurs	Rest	
Fri	Rest	

Sat	10-15 mins very easy jog in race kit and shoes	Super slow
Sun	Half marathon race! with easy warm-up and cool-down	

Race week preparation

The focus for your final week before your event should be relaxing and doing easier sessions as you gather your energy for your race. Competing in a race requires some planning and organisation so that you can produce your best performance, rather than get caught up in traffic jams or missing key items of kit. Use your extra free time in the final week to plan and prepare for your big day. To make sure that your race goes without a hitch, follow our top race tips below:

1. Assemble and check all your kit early on in the final week, including your timing chip if one is provided.
2. Don't experiment with new kit items on race day, stick with tried, trusted and broken in items so that you avoid any unplanned chafing problems.
3. Eat your usual meals on race day, just as if it was a normal training run. Now is not the time to experiment with new energy drinks!
4. Take a box of 'emergency items' such as spare laces and a couple of old T-shirts in case the weather is poor whilst you are warming up.
5. Check over the race organiser's instructions and route descriptions so that you are familiar with all arrangements.
6. Arrive at the race venue early. By arriving early, you can settle in and check out the start and finish, which will give you the best chance of enjoying your race experience.

Conclusion

Well done!

You have come to the end of the schedule, and your fitness has improved dramatically to the point where you are able to complete a half marathon. You will have made significant health and fitness gains, and equally importantly, you have progressed safely. By maintaining your training, you will be making a major contribution to your long-term health and fitness, and this schedule can also serve as a foundation and springboard to increase your fitness levels further. Now you've completed your race, you may be tempted to step up and try to improve your finishing time. Enjoy your training.



Disclaimer

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