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a Marathon*
FOR
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by Jason R. Karp, PhD



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About the Author

Jason R. Karp, PhD, is a nationally recognized running and fitness coach, freelance writer and author, and exercise physiologist. He owns RunCoachJason.com, a state-of-the-science run coaching and personal training company in San Diego, California. As one of America's foremost running experts and the 2011 IDEA Personal Trainer of the Year (the fitness industry's highest award), Dr. Karp is a trusted source of information. Through his writing, conference presentations, DVDs, and numerous print and television interviews on topics related to running and fitness, he brings the state of the science directly to the public. A sought-after speaker, he is a frequent presenter at national fitness, coaching, and academic conferences. A nationally certified running coach through USA Track & Field, he has also taught USATF's highest level coaching certification and was an instructor at the USATF/U.S. Olympic Committee's Emerging Elite Coaches Camp at the U.S. Olympic Training Center. He also regularly holds clinics for runners, coaches, and fitness professionals.

He is a prolific writer, with more than 200 articles in numerous international coaching, running, and fitness trade and consumer magazines, including *Track Coach*, *Techniques for Track & Field and Cross Country*, *New Studies in Athletics*, *Athletics Weekly*, *Running Times*, *Runner's World*, *Trail Runner*, *Women's Running*, *Marathon & Beyond*, *IDEA Fitness Journal*, *Shape*, and *Ultra-Fit*, among others. He is also the author of four other books: *Running for Women* (Human Kinetics), *101 Winning Racing Strategies for Runners* (Coaches Choice), *101 Developmental Concepts & Workouts for Cross Country Runners* (Coaches Choice), and *How to Survive Your PhD* (Sourcebooks).

Dr. Karp has coached cross-country and track at the high school, college, and elite club levels. In 1997, at the age of 24, he became one of the youngest collegiate head coaches in the country, leading the Georgian Court University (NJ) women's cross-country team to the regional championship and winning honors as NAIA Northeast Region Coach of the Year. His personal training experience ranges from elite athletes to cardiac rehab patients. As a private coach and founder of *REVO₂LT Running Team*, he has helped many runners meet their potential, ranging from a first-time race participant to an Olympic marathon trials qualifier. He has been profiled in a number of publications and is sponsored by PowerBar as a member of PowerBar Team Elite. His popular downloadable training programs are used by runners around the world.

Dr. Karp received his PhD in exercise physiology, with a physiology minor, from Indiana University in 2007; his master's degree in kinesiology from the University of Calgary in 1997; and his bachelor's degree in exercise and sport science, with an English minor, from Pennsylvania State University in 1995. His research includes motor unit recruitment during eccentric muscle contractions, post-exercise nutrition for optimal recovery in endurance athletes, training characteristics of Olympic marathon trials qualifiers, and the coordination of breathing and stride rate in distance runners. His research has been published in the scientific journals *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, *International Journal of Sport Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism*, and *International Journal of Sports Physiology and Performance*. Dr. Karp has taught at several universities and currently teaches dissertation writing, a course he designed for doctoral students, at the University of California, San Diego.

Dedication

For my father, Monroe, whose long walking strides through the streets of Brooklyn, New York, caused me to run to keep up. Perhaps it was those fond moments as a kid with my father that planted the seed for me to become a runner. And for my mother, Muriel, who always told me how proud she was of me and who taught me how to endure and “roll with the punches.” In her memory, I’m donating 10 percent of my royalty on every book sold to Susan G. Komen for the Cure.

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I’d also like to thank my twin brother, Jack, for inspiring me to be as good a writer as he is and for not making nearly as many jokes as he could have about me writing a book for dummies; my hard-working agent, Grace Freedson, who made this book possible and who thankfully understands my perfectionism; Traci Cumbay, who helped with the initial “dummifying” of my writing; photographer Maurice Roy, for his great photographs that beautifully illustrate my text; models Martha Carbajal Moreno, Natalie Jill, and Pedro Molina, who made the photographs pop off the page; and my parents, who left this world much too early but who are with me with every word I write and every step I run.

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Introduction

To paraphrase the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius, “A journey of 26.2 miles begins with a single step.” From the time the ancient Greek runner Pheidippides ran from Marathon to Athens in 490 BC to announce the Greeks’ victory over Persia in the Battle of Marathon, humans have had a compelling interest in taking that single step, and many more after that.

Humans have repeatedly tried to push the limits of running endurance, which have been nothing short of remarkable: 50 marathons in 50 days and 300 miles of nonstop running by Dean Karnazes of the United States, and the current world records in the marathon, which equal an average marathon pace of 5 minutes and 10 seconds per mile by England’s Paula Radcliffe and 4 minutes and 43 seconds per mile by Kenya’s Patrick Makau.

So when people, upon finding out what I do for a living, tell me they can’t run, I have to smile to myself. Of course they can run. And you can, too. Running is in your DNA. As long as you train your body properly, it has a remarkable capacity to adapt and endure. Whether you want to run a marathon just for the thrill of it or qualify for the Boston Marathon, it all starts with a single step, which leads to another step, and then another, and then another. When you put all those steps together and they cover 26.2 miles, you become a marathoner.

This book is all about getting you to become a marathoner, whether it’s your first one or fastest one. As the famous Czech runner Emil Zátopek, who won five gold medals in two Olympics, once said, “If you want to win something, run 100 meters. If you want to experience something, run a marathon.”

The marathon truly is different from any other running race. It unites people. When you’re in the race, it doesn’t matter what your income is or how beautiful or handsome you are or what your ethnicity is or what type of car you drive; everyone has 26.2 miles to run. And that’s not easy for anyone.

The marathon changes people’s lives. And it will change yours.

About This Book

Much like the marathon itself, *Running a Marathon For Dummies* is a journey — it took just as long to write as it takes to train for a marathon! This book is for anyone who wants to run a marathon, and it covers everything you need to know about the marathon, and then some. Within it, you find information on

- ✔ Preparing to run a marathon
- ✔ Choosing the right running gear
- ✔ Proper running form
- ✔ Different training strategies and workouts
- ✔ Training programs for beginner, intermediate, and advanced runners
- ✔ Diagnosing and preventing injuries
- ✔ Racing strategies and tips
- ✔ Destination marathons
- ✔ Frequently asked questions about the marathon
- ✔ And so much more!

In contrast to the marathon itself, in which you can't run mile 24 without first running miles 1 to 23, you don't need to read this book from start to finish (although I put a lot of time into it, so I hope you read the whole thing). You can pick and choose the topics you want to read about and then set the book aside until you need it again. Using this book is that simple.

Conventions Used in This Book

I use the following conventions throughout the book to make things consistent and easy to understand:

- ✔ New terms appear in *italic* and are followed by a definition. I also use italics for emphasis.
- ✔ **Bold text** highlights the action parts of numbered steps and the keywords in bulleted lists.
- ✔ All web addresses appear in `monofont`.

When this book was printed, some web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If that happened, rest assured that I've added no extra characters, such as hyphens, to indicate the break. So when using one of these web addresses,

simply type in exactly what you see in the book as though the line break doesn't exist.

What You're Not to Read

As a writer, I believe every word I write is important. But I understand that not every word between the covers needs to be read. After all, the more time you spend reading, the less time you have to run! The skippable material in this book includes the following:

- ✔ **Text in sidebars:** The sidebars are shaded boxes that appear throughout the book. They contain information that's interesting but not critical to your understanding of a particular marathon-related topic.
- ✔ **Text next to the Technical Stuff icon:** I went to college for 13 years to study the science of exercise and to understand how to make runners run better. I love physiology and love applying that physiology to a training program. However, I know that many runners just want to know what to do and don't care why they're doing it. So you don't *have* to read the information marked by the Technical Stuff icon, but I hope you do. Like the text in sidebars, the text with this icon is interesting but not crucial to the goal of running a marathon.
- ✔ **The stuff on the copyright, dedication, and author's acknowledgments pages:** Seriously. There's nothing there that can help you run a marathon. Unless you want to know the Library of Congress info, whom I dedicated the book to, or how I thanked my twin brother for his jokes about me writing a book for dummies, just skip these pages.
- ✔ **The about the author page:** You don't need to know who I am to know that this is the best book on running a marathon out there. After all, all *For Dummies* authors are considered experts in their fields. But feel free to take a peek to satisfy your curiosity. It may impress you.

Foolish Assumptions

In writing this book, I had to make some assumptions about you (please forgive me). I assume that you

- ✔ **Know how to run:** Though it may seem hard to do at times, running is in your genes. Although some people are more graceful and efficient runners than others, I assume you know the basic idea of how to run, even if your tongue is hanging out and you don't look pretty doing it.

- ✔ **Are in good health and are physically capable of undertaking the training to run long distances:** The marathon is a big physical challenge, so if you have any health issues or are older than 40, consult your doctor before training for a marathon.
- ✔ **Are a little crazy:** You have to be a little crazy to run a marathon. It's a long way to run.
- ✔ **Know that a marathon is 26.2 miles:** If you didn't know that before picking up this book, you do now. (I hope you'll still read it.)
- ✔ **Are ready to run your first or fastest marathon:** This book is for first-timers as well as those who have some marathon experience and want to run the marathon again — and better than ever.

How This Book Is Organized

Running a Marathon For Dummies is divided into five parts, each of which contains several chapters. If you've never run a marathon before, you may want to start at the beginning. If you have run a marathon, feel free to skip around to chapters that address your needs. The upcoming sections are a guide to what you find in each part of the book.

Part 1: The Basics of Running a Marathon

In this part, I give you an overview of running a marathon, including some insight into its growing popularity, the expected time commitment you need to prepare for it, unique aspects of the marathon, and directions for getting started.

Because marathon running literally starts with your feet, I also give you information on how to pick the right shoes. With all the different types of running shoes and the bells and whistles on them, how do you know what you need or whether you need shoes at all?

In addition, I talk about other running gear, I show you correct running technique to keep you moving without injury, and I tell you all about the elegant changes your heart, blood, and muscles make so that you can run 26.2 miles without falling over!

Part II: Creating Your Own Marathon Training Plan

In this part, you get all the training information you need, whether you're a newbie runner or an experienced marathoner looking to run your best race yet. I give you the thorough information that gets you from point A to the finish line. I show you how training works, including how many miles to run, how to get the most out of your long runs, and how to improve your fitness with tempo training and interval training.

I also give you 20-week plans for beginner, intermediate, and advanced runners, laid out in an easy-to-follow, calendar-style format that includes each day's specific training.

Part III: Going Above and Beyond to Stay Strong and Healthy

Training for a marathon can and should be about more than just running. This part is about everything non-running that keeps you healthy and strong — strength training, cross-training with non-running activities, stretching, and recovery.

Because the last thing you want is to get injured while training, I also give you a detailed guide to common running-related injuries, including the secrets of preventing them!

Part IV: Gearing Up for Race Day (And Beyond)

You do so much to prep your body for the marathon, and you also want to prep for the big day by easing your jitters and increasing your odds of running a good race.

In this part, I talk about the marathon taper — your time to slow down and give your body a much-needed rest in preparation for the big effort to come. I give you tips for getting your mind (and gear) ready for the race, and I take you through a race so that you're armed with all the knowledge that my years of coaching and running have taught me.

Part V: The Part of Tens

Want to know what to do on marathon race day? What about how to avoid the most common training errors? Want to run a marathon

while on vacation? From helpful and sometimes humorous race day tips to the best destination marathons in the world to frequently asked questions about running a marathon, you find quick bits of juicy information about marathons in this part.

Icons Used in This Book

Every *For Dummies* book has little pictures in the margins — *icons* — to help direct your attention to certain kinds of information. *Running a Marathon For Dummies* is no exception. I use the following icons to categorize the information in this book.



Some points are worth returning to again and again. This icon highlights important concepts and ideas that you're likely to want to flip back to quickly.



In some instances, I go deeper into the physiology of running than you may be interested in. I'm a big fan of this kind of information and think it helps you understand the *what* and *why* of training. But I also know that I'm a rare bird, so feel free to skip this info. You can run a marathon just fine without it.



Whenever I provide information that saves you time or frustration or clues you into a more efficient training process, I highlight that text with this icon.



You can train smart and still get injured. If you follow bad training advice, you're even more likely to end up hurt. Whenever I discuss something you should be careful about or a misguided notion that can leave you limping or otherwise inhibit your training, I mark it with this daunting icon.

Where to Go from Here

You can start *Running a Marathon For Dummies* with any chapter you like. That's the beauty of this book — you don't have to read it cover to cover (unless you really want to).

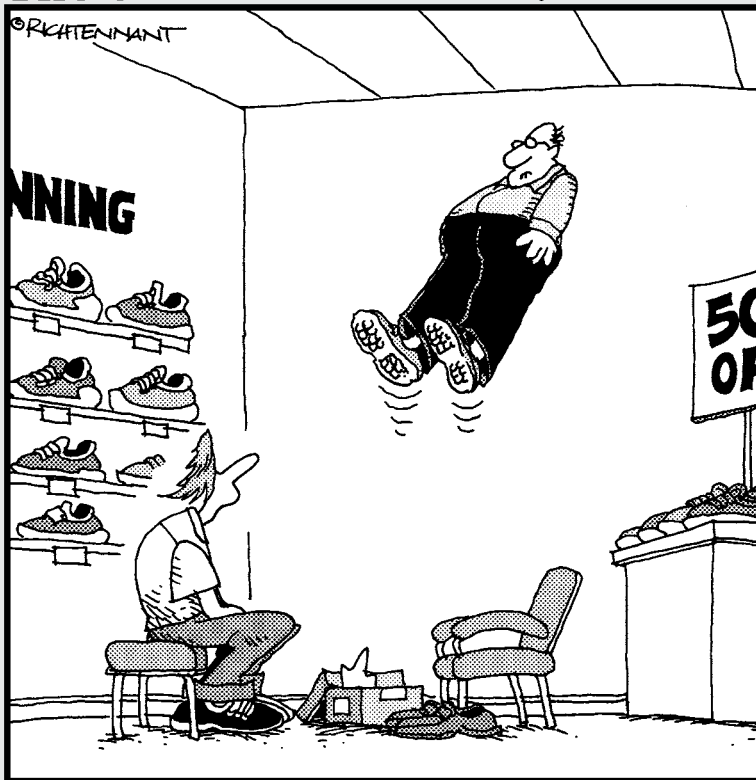
If you're a beginner runner, I recommend that you start by reading Chapters 1 and 2 so you can get an overview of the journey you're about to take. If you've run a marathon before, I recommend that you start by reading Chapter 3 — which covers the physiology behind the training so that you can train smarter and run your next marathon better — and Chapter 4, just to make sure you have the proper running technique. Or you can just jump in and start reading wherever you land! Good luck!

Part I

The Basics of Running a Marathon

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"Do you have running shoes with more control than this?"

In this part...

It's time to get moving! This part gives you an overview of running a marathon, including the expected time commitment to prepare for it, unique aspects of the marathon, and directions for getting started.

I also give you information on how to pick the right shoes and gear to run in different climates so you start off your training on the right foot . . . literally.

I also devote a chapter to the basic physiology of running a marathon and all the changes your heart, blood, and muscles make with training that allow you to run 26.2 miles successfully (or faster than you've ever run before!). Finally, I show you correct running technique so you can begin training!

Chapter 1

Training for the Big Race: An Overview

In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering the reasons for running a marathon
 - ▶ Finding time to train for the marathon
 - ▶ Preparing for the marathon and anticipating challenges
 - ▶ Training with a group or training alone
 - ▶ Hiring a coach to help you train
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When Pierre de Coubertin from France founded the modern Olympic games that were first held in Athens, Greece, in 1896, he decided to include a long running race. Being the sentimental guy that he was, he named the race a *marathon* after the Greek town where the ancient Greek runner Pheidippides's legendary run began. Little did he know how popular his little footrace would become.

With nearly 500 marathons in the United States each year and half a million people running them, saying that running a marathon is a big deal is an understatement. It has become a popular item on people's bucket lists. It may even be on yours. Perhaps that's because people recognize the truth in what running philosopher George Sheehan once said: "The marathon is an adventure into the limits of the self, a theater for heroism, where the runner can do deeds of daring and greatness." And it gives you really nice legs!

Running a marathon is a huge undertaking. There's a lot to know after you decide to do it. Where do you begin? In this chapter, I give you an overview of running a marathon, including the expected time commitment to prepare for it, ways to get started, and potential challenges.

Why Run a Marathon?

Before you start preparing to run a marathon, you should know why you're doing it. After all, deciding to run a marathon isn't like deciding what to eat for dinner or what to order at your favorite coffee shop. It's a pretty big decision that requires commitment. So why you're doing it is an important first question to ask yourself. You may want to run a marathon for many reasons:

- ✔ **To get fit:** Training for a marathon is a great way to improve your aerobic fitness (not to mention get a great butt). Nothing gets you fit like running. Because running involves your whole body, it trains all your muscles. It also drives your heart rate up higher than any other activity, which is a powerful stimulus to improve your cardiovascular fitness.
- ✔ **To lose weight:** Running is one of the best ways to lose weight because it burns more calories than just about every other activity. And because training for a marathon means a whole lot of running, that's quite a lot of calories. Most people, even seasoned runners, drop at least a few pounds during marathon training.
- ✔ **To challenge yourself:** Humans often like to undertake difficult endeavors — to set tough goals and go after them. What better way to challenge yourself than to run 26.2 miles? Doing so is both a physical challenge and a test of your mental strength.
- ✔ **To accomplish something and improve your self-esteem:** Trying — and better yet, succeeding at — something you think is difficult feels good. It feeds your ego and makes you feel better about yourself. Even though running a marathon is becoming more popular, those who do it are still the minority.
- ✔ **To bond with your friends and family:** Running a marathon can be very social, as you and your friends and family can share the experience together. Many people train for and run marathons together. The support (and the shame factor when you flake out of a group training run) can provide a lot of motivation, and those long runs offer plenty of time to catch up with your fellow runners.
- ✔ **To raise money for charity:** Running a marathon is a great way to raise money for a good cause. When you run for charity, you're not just running for you anymore; you feel a measure of responsibility. You're running for kids with leukemia or for your mom with cancer. You're doing something good for yourself *and* others.
- ✔ **To assuage your midlife crisis:** Getting your mind off your age is actually a very common reason to run a marathon. Lots of

people make big decisions and like to shake things up a bit when they hit those milestone birthdays, like 40 or 50 (or 60 and beyond). Doing something challenging is a great distraction from those creeping anxieties about aging. The amazing benefit of running a marathon as a distraction is that it has the power to make you feel younger.

- ✓ **To cross it off your bucket list:** The marathon has become a popular bucket-list item, one of those things to do before you, well, kick the bucket. A lot of people want to experience the challenge of training for and running 26.2 miles just for the sake of doing it. It's right up there with skydiving (only safer).

Making the Time to Train for a Marathon

Some things you can do at the last minute, like picking up dinner at a fast-food restaurant, mailing your taxes on April 15, and sending your twin brother an e-card because you failed to remember his birthday until 9:54 p.m.

Didn't expect to see "training for a marathon" on that list, did you? I hope not; training for a marathon is a huge endeavor that normally takes months and that you need to take seriously. For many reasons, it's not something you can do (or should try to do) in a few weeks, and risk of injury is probably the major reason to take your time. The biggest risk of injury comes when you run too much too soon, before your bones, muscles, tendons, and ligaments are able to completely adapt. (I tell you more about common running injuries in Chapter 13.)

Great strides: The growth of the marathon

The marathon has grown faster than a bodybuilder on steroids. According to MarathonGuide.com, 299,000 people completed a marathon in the United States in 2000, growing to 503,000 in 2010. In 2000, 62.5 percent of marathoners were male, and 37.5 percent were female. In 2010, 58.8 percent were male, and 41.2 percent were female.

Many popular marathons are held in the United States, which hosted a whopping 483 of them in 2010. The largest marathon in the United States is the ING New York City Marathon, which boasted 44,704 finishers in 2010. The next five largest marathons (by number of finishers in 2010) are the Bank of America Chicago Marathon (36,159), the Boston Marathon (22,540), the LA Marathon (22,403), the Marine Corps Marathon (21,874), and the Honolulu Marathon (20,169).

The amount of time to prepare for a marathon varies from person to person, according to circumstances, goals, and a lot of other things, including

- ✔ Your prior running experience
- ✔ How many days per week you plan to run
- ✔ How quickly your body adapts to training and how much recovery time you need, which influence your risk of injuries
- ✔ How fast you want to run the marathon



If you're a new runner, I recommend running a few days per week for at least a year before running a marathon. Run some other races, like 5Ks and 10Ks, and work your way up to the half-marathon and marathon. That's the safest way to do it. The marathon requires maturity, in terms of both training and experience. Trying to run a marathon without first becoming a runner is like trying to earn a PhD without first earning a bachelor's degree. You increase the risk of injuries and of making training and racing mistakes.

The exact amount of time you need to train for a marathon depends on how long and how often you've been running:

- ✔ If you've been running up to 20 miles per week for at least a year but have never run a marathon before, give yourself eight to ten months to prepare for it.
- ✔ If you've been running for a few years and have run a marathon before, give yourself six to eight months to prepare.
- ✔ If you're one of those speedy types who runs every day, sleeps with your running shoes on, and makes running a marathon as much a habit as eating pasta and soaking your legs in cold water, give yourself enough time to fully recover from your last marathon and to ramp your mileage back up before attempting another one. Typically, that means about four to six months, especially if you want to run your next marathon faster.

Depending on your level and goals, you can run a marathon on 5 to 15 hours of training per week. That includes the (increasingly) long run you'll do each week.

Training for a marathon isn't just a time commitment for you; it's a time commitment for your family, too. So unless you're single with no responsibilities other than yourself, you need to let your family know how important running a marathon is to you so they can be supportive. Someone has to watch the kids when you're out running for three hours on Sunday morning!