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Sixteen week schedule to break 3 hours in the marathon

The majority of a marathon needs to be run aerobically. Endurance is key but in order to run it under 3 hours you have to be able to run at a good pace without tipping over your lactate threshold. So you have two priorities:

Run big mileage to build a good aerobic base

Work to increase your lactate tolerance so that you can move quickly without tipping over the line.

This programme begins on around 65 miles a week so should only be taken up by runners who have already built up to that volume. It increases from here and so requires the runner to be able to train twice in a day on some days by putting in an easy morning run and doing a harder session in the late afternoon or evening.

There are several sessions included that require the runner to run alternatively between 5km/10km pace and half marathon/marathon pace. These are called lactate shuttle sessions and make the body practice getting rid of lactic acid (that builds up during the faster running) whilst on the move and running just below this threshold pace.

In order to do this amount of training the runner has to be strong and conditioned. It is a hard schedule! To prepare for this schedule the runner should not only build up mileage but should do gym work to make sure muscles, tendons and ligaments can take the loading that this programme demands. Otherwise there is a great risk of breaking down before the big day! I have suggested putting in an Oregon Circuit* on most Wednesdays. This combines strength work with aerobic work so the runner keeps the heart rate up throughout the session. By doing this you can get a double whammy of strength work and extra mileage.

You should also consider doing plenty of your miles off road as this is a much more forgiving surface on your legs so, if you have the luxury of daylight make sure you get out and make the most of running in the park or on trails.

E = Easy pace

T = Threshold pace (half marathon race pace or 85 - 90% of your maximum heart rate.

F = Faster than race pace at around 95% of your maximum heart rate. Take around the same amount of time to run easy in between the fast efforts. If you use a heart rate monitor you should allow your heart rate to get down to 60% - 75% of your maximum before starting the next effort.

Any session that includes fast running should also include a 10 minute warm up with dynamic stretching and a 10 minute cool down with static stretching. The sessions don't have to be done on the days suggested - they should fit in and around the rest of your life but try to keep to the formula of having an easy day or a day of rest after the faster sessions. Recovery is a very important part of training. Likewise, if you are feeling tired on a day where a fast session is scheduled, save it for another day and have a day off or an easy run. It is important to listen to your body. It will tell you when you need recovery. An elevated resting heart rate is also an indication that you need to rest as there is a possibility that you are fighting off a bug or virus. Don't run if you are ill or run down. You shouldn't try to make up for lost time either. If you have to miss sessions it is probably best to get back onto the schedule where you left off and change your target race.

To calculate percentage of maximum heart rate:

Maximum heart rate = approximately 220 minus your age. This is a rough estimate. To get a better indication you could consider [physiological testing](#) or do 4 X 400m fast running with a reduction in recovery between each one. Have 3 minutes after the first one, then 2 minutes and then 1 minute. You should get your heart rate to its maximum with this session.

Subtract your resting heart rate (should be taken on waking up)

Calculate the percentage of this number and then add the resting heart rate back on.

Eg, Joe is 40 years old with a resting heart rate of 60.

His fast running should be done at 95% of maximum heart rate:

$$220 - 40 = 180$$

$$180 - 60 = 120$$

$$95\% \text{ of } 120 = 114$$

$$114 + 60 = 174$$

174 - pace for speed sessions.

Recovery is until the heart rate drops to 60% - 75%



The Oregon circuit is a circuit of exercises where you run in between the exercise stations. It is recommended that you base it on around 12 exercises with equal balance of upper body, core and legs spaced out so that you don't work one part of the body consecutively and allow a group of muscles time to recover. Each exercise should be performed for around 30 seconds depending on conditioning. After a complete circuit of exercises you should jog for five minutes then repeat the sequence once more. You should build up gradually to completing the entire programme.

An example would be:

- 15 mins easy running followed by 5 X 20 seconds striding.
- Press ups, 20 seconds striding
- Sit ups, 20 seconds striding
- squats, 20 seconds striding
- Tricep dips, 20 seconds striding
- Back extensions, 20 seconds striding
- lunges, 20 seconds striding
- Pull ups, 20 seconds striding
- Crunchies, 20 seconds striding
- Squat thrusts, 20 seconds striding
- Bicep curls, 20 seconds striding
- The plank with slow arm/leg raises, 20 seconds striding
- Single leg squats, 20 seconds striding
- Medicine ball push throw (will need a partner), 20 second striding
- Twisting trunk curl, 20 seconds striding
- Step ups, 20 seconds striding X 2
- 15 mins easy running

By Jackie Newton. Level 3 UKA endurance coach.

Week one						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
75 mins hilly with efforts up the hills	60 mins E	20 mins E, 20 mins T, 20 mins E	90 mins E	REST	10 mins E, 20 mins T followed by 8 X 90 secs F, 10 mins E	2 hours E
Week 2						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
75 mins hilly with efforts up the hills	am - 30 mins E pm - 75 mins E	90 mins E	am - 45 mins E pm - 15 mins E, 12 mins T, 4 mins E, 12 mins T, 15 mins E	REST	parkrun with a good 20 mins warm up and 20 mins cool down	2 hours E
Week 3						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
60 mins E	am - 45 mins E pm - 10 mins E, 8 X 8 mins T, 4 mins E, 10 mins E	15 mins E, 30 mins oregon circuit, 15 mins E	am - 45 mins E pm - 10 mins E, 5 X 4 mins F, 10 mins E	REST	10 mins E then alternate 6 X 90 secs F, 90 secs T, 10 mins E	90 mins E but gradually increase the pace of the last 30 mins so the last 20 mins is at threshold
Week 4						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
75 mins hilly with efforts up the hills	am - 45 mins E pm - 5 X 6 mins F	15 mins E, 30 mins Oregon Circuit, 15 mins E	am - 45 mins pm - 10 mins E then alternate 2 X 2 mins F, 2 mins T, 8 X 1	75 mins E	REST	2 1/2 hours E

			min F, 1 min T, 8 X 30 secs F, 30 secs T, 10 mins E			
Week 5						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
60 mins E	am - 45 mins E pm 10 mins E, 10 mins T, 5 mins E, 10 mins T, 5 mins E, 10 mins T, 10 mins E	am - 45 mins E pm - 15 mins E, 30 mins Oregon Circuit, 15 mins E	am - 45 mins pm - 10 mins E, 10 mins @ marathon pace, 5 mins T, 5 mins @ 10km pace, 5 mins @ 5km pace, 3 mins @ 3K pace, 1 min @ 1 mile pace, 1 mile F, 10 mins E	40 mins E	10 mins E, 40 mins T, 10 mins E	90 mins E but gradually increase the pace in the last 30 mins so the last 20 mins is at threshold
Week 6						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
75 mins E + 12 X 20 secs F	am 30 mins E pm 10 mins E, 20 mins T, 10 mins E	60 mins E	am 30 mins E pm 10 mins E then alternate 12 X 90 secs F, 60 secs T, 10 mins E	45 mins E	40 mins E	Good warm up then race 10km, long cool down
Week 7						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
75 mins E + 12 X 20 secs F	am - 30 mins E pm - 6 X 6 mins F	10 mins E, 30 mins Oregon Circuit, 10 mins E	am - 30 mins E 10 mins E, 10 mins T, 10 mins F, 10 mins E, 10 mins T, 10 mins F, 10 mins E	40 mins E	parkrun	2 hours E
Week 8						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
75 mins hilly with efforts up the hills	am - 45 mins E pm - 10 mins E, 40 mins T, 10 mins E	45 mins E	am - 45 mins E pm - 5 X 4 mins F	REST	40 mins E	3 hours E
Week 9						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
75 mins E + 12 X 20 secs F	am - 30 mins E pm - 15 mins E, 3 X 8 mins T, 4 mins E, 15 mins E	am 45 mins E, 30 mins Oregon Circuit, 15 mins E	am - 30 mins E pm - 8 X 2 mins F	REST	45 mins E	10km race
Week 10						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
60 mins hilly with efforts	am - 30 mins E	am 45 mins E	am - 30 mins E	REST	REST or 20 mins slow	Half Marathon

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up the hills	pm - 10 mins E, 20 mins T + 8 X 90 secs F, 10 mins E	pm 15 mins E, 30 mins Oregon Circuit, 15 mins E	pm - 5 X 4 mins F		jog	race
Week 11						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
75 mins E + 12 X 20 secs F	am 30 mins E pm - 6 X 6 mins F	15 mins E, 30 mins Oregon Circuit, 15 mins E	am 30 mins E pm - 10 mins E, 3 mins F, 2 mins T, 4 1/2 mins F, 3 mins T, 6 mins F, 4 mins T, 6 mins F, 4 mins T, 4 1/2 mins F, 3 mins T, 3 mins F, 2 mins T, 10 mins E	REST	park run or 10 mins E, 30 mins T, 10 mins E	3 hours E
Week 12						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
75 mins E + 12 X 20 secs F	am - 30 mins E pm - 16 X 90 secs F	15 mins E, 30 mins Oregon circuit, 15 mins E	am - 30 mins E pm - 10 mins E, 45 mins T, 10 mins E	REST	40 mins E	2 1/2 hours E
Week 13						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
60 mins hilly with efforts up the hills	am 45 mins E pm 10 mins E, 3 X 10 mins T, 4 mins E, 10 mins E	15 mins E, Oregon Circuit, 15 mins E	am 45 mins E pm 10 mins E, 30 mins T, 10 mins E	REST	parkrun	2 hours E but gradually increase the pace of the last 30 mins to run last 20 mins at threshold
Week 14						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
75 mins E	10 mins E, 3 mins F, 2 mins T, 4 1/2 mins F, 3 mins T, 6 mins F, 4 mins T, 6 mins F, 4 mins T, 4 1/2 mins F, 3 mins T, 3 mins F, 2 mins T, 10 mins E	45 mins E	60 mins E + 12 X 20 secs F	40 mins E	parkrun	2 hours E
Week 15						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
60 mins E	6 X 6 mins F	45 mins E	16 X 90 secs F	REST	45 mins E	90 mins E
Week 16						
Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
40 mins E	20 mins E, 20 mins T, 20 mins E	40 mins E	40 mins E	REST	30 mins E	RACE DAY

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Squirrel Chops — Was actually disappointed when the race was over, I was having so much fun :-)

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1 comment • 3 months ago



G — Jo Thom's winning ladies' time is wrong, should be 3:05:04

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1 comment • 3 months ago



Sally Goble — Oh please! You cannot be serious! Using posh as an example of a person who knows about health and fitness. I am ...

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1 comment • 3 months ago



Rob — Has there been some changes to the handicap formula in the last week or so? Noticed a big change in my rankings without ...

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