

The 48 Hour Countdown

It's Friday morning and your first marathon is on Sunday. There is nothing left to do to make you fitter for the race, but there are many ways to avoid sabotaging your event. The goal is to have fun, run to completion and not freak out before the race starts.

First and foremost, thank your family and friends for supporting you during your training. Athletes tend to turn into 3 year olds when training for a big event: hungry, tired and cranky.

The next step is to mentally check in with yourself. Be accepting if you needed to modify your training plan due to family responsibilities, work commitments, or injury setbacks. Your journey to the starting line was your unique story. Sometimes the obstacles make us stronger and the reward even sweeter when we see the finish line. Do not waste energy stressing over things you can't control. Now close your eyes and visualize the starting line, running strong, and crossing the finish line happy and healthy. Now do it again.

One last workout before the race may include a Saturday 20 minute easy run followed by 3-5 pick-ups (pick up the speed and intensity to 85% max effort for 10-20 seconds, then slow back down). This can help avoid feeling stagnant in your legs and helps to get the blood moving.

The day before the race organize your clothes, race number, shoes, socks, and hat. Plan what layers you will wear and what you will peel off. Remember if you are going to carry gels or food, do not keep them in the top layer you'll peeling off. Figure out how many gels you will need and where you will actually carry them. Prepare your morning electrolyte drink to take to the starting line. Make sure you measure the powdered drink accurately to keep the titration as directed.

Don't worry or get stressed out about not sleeping. It is normal to be nervous and not be able to relax enough to get a restful night of sleep. You can sleep after the marathon.

Avoid "carbo-loading" the night before. Too many carbohydrates can leave you feeling bloated the next day. Have a "normal", balanced dinner the night before the race consisting of carbs, protein, and veggies. Keep hydrated with water and electrolyte drinks the night before and the morning of the event. Be careful not to over hydrate by becoming a victim of nervous drinking water every hour.

The morning of your marathon, eat 2-3 hours before your event. Eat at least 100-300 calories to get your metabolism to kick in. Hopefully you have done a few breakfast trials during your long runs so you know your tolerance for fiber or other harder to digest foods. If you chose to drink coffee, make sure to hydrate well. Coffee is a diuretic and can soften stool. Not a good combination while standing at the starting line.

The big day is here! To calm your nerves, go for a 10-20 minute easy run, followed by gentle stretching or a dynamic warm-up. Go to the bathroom one more time. Then it's ready, set, go! As you are running your marathon, remember you are fortunate enough to be able to participate in a marathon and all your training is finished. Running the race is the fun part. Good luck and have a fun event!

By Chris Chorak, PT