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Predicting Success in Finishing a Marathon

What is the minimum amount of training necessary to be able to complete a 40-kilo marathon. How many miles per day, miles per week or time per run for how many weeks of training are necessary in order to be able to finish a marathon? There are many answers with varied ranges to this question.

Most experts express the minimum requirements to prepare for a marathon in terms of either the number of miles run, or time of running per day or week.

Intuitively it seems that the minimum amount of training necessary to complete a marathon should vary from one individual to another, as each individual comes to the event with different physiological and psychological make up.

George Sheehan noted sportsmedicine physician who was a prolific author in the sixties and seventies said 30 miles per week for at least two months should allow you to finish the marathon distance.

Jack Scaff and Tom Carlson who organized and conducted the Honolulu Marathon Training Clinic over many years professed that if you can run one hour three days a week you have a 98% chance of completing a marathon.

Harold Tinsely veteran marathoner with multiple world age group records and previous president of the RRCA has written that fifty miles per week is the minimum to ensure completion of a marathon. He states 50 miles per week will require considerable drive and motivation. Seventy miles per week will allow a good performance with minimal discomfort.

Ken Young founder of the National Center on Running Statistics used actual data and statistical analysis to calculate the "collapse point", the point at which one breaks down in a long distance race. His theory is that the training mileage over the previous 8 weeks sets the limits on how far

you can hold a fast pace. The limit is about three times your daily average. Using this theory a runner who averages 9 miles per day (63 miles/week) you can expect to collapse at 26 miles and lose the ability to maintain a fast pace. Training an average of 7 miles per day your collapse point is at the proverbial 20 mile wall. .

Dr Ernst Van Aaken noted German woman's distance coach and the "father of Long Slow Distance Training" is of the opinion that you need to run daily, run slowly, and run 40 kilometers a day (26 miles/day) in order to successfully complete a marathon.

Expert opinion of what is the minimum amount of training necessary in order to complete a marathon varies from as little as 30 miles per week to 182 miles per week.

Long Run Theory

A recent published descriptive research concluded the critical measure of predicting successful completion of a marathon is not the amount of running per week but the length of the long run as the best predictor.

SS Yeung (2001) surveyed just over 100 runners who started the Hong Kong Marathon. Data was gathered regarding on weekly mileage, longest and shortest training distance per session, number of previous marathons completed, whether the runner did stretching exercises. After statistical analysis it was concluded the longest mileage covered per training session is the best predictor for successful completion of a marathon. The number of weekly miles was not predictive of success in completing a marathon. Whether the runner did stretching exercises or not did not predict success in completing a marathon. How long the long run was the best predictor of successful completion of a marathon. The important factor was not that you run 60 miles per week, but that your long run is as long as you can achieve without developing an injury prior to the race.

This is in agreement with the popular book and training program by Jeff Galloway who suggests building the long run to 26 to 28 miles before attempting the marathon and to do this last long run 2 to 3 weeks before the marathon.

For the first 20 years of my Marathon career I practiced the belief that I should train at least 60 miles per week in preparation to run a marathon. I did not pay much attention to how long my long runs were. Over the last 15 years my training has evolved to include increased amounts of cross

training and it has been a very long time since I have run 60-mile weeks. I have been able to successfully complete marathons by training 30 to 40 miles per week. I have also evolved to the belief that the test of whether I should attempt to run a marathon is whether I can successfully run/walk the total time I would expect to run a marathon. If I expect to be on my feet during the marathon I do a training run/walk of at least 4 hours. This is a variation of Jeff Galloway's run the distance of the marathon 2 to 3 weeks before to run the time you expect to be on your feet 2 to 3 weeks before the marathon.

When training for a marathon pay attention to the length of the long runs as well as the amount of weekly running.