

On your marks, get set....

Tips for Marathon First Timers



If you're tackling the London marathon or any other for the first time this year, you'll have spent a few months preparing yourself for the physical demands of running 26.2 miles (we hope!). You might also have set aside some time to prepare mentally by working out some strategies for pushing through when the going gets really tough on your runs. There are, however, some aspects of any marathon that are very hard to prepare for if you haven't done it before. With 40,000 people on the course and several times that number lining the streets to cheer them on, the London marathon in particular is a unique event. Even if you've completed one or two other races, the chances are they won't have entirely prepared you for what you'll experience on the streets of the capital.

Here are our top tips for competing in a marathon such as London to get the best experience

Don't Get New Gear at the Expo "Tried and tested" is the mantra to live by for the gear and nutrition you use on marathon day. Snazzy new shoes could lead to blisters, a new t-shirt could be a chafing nightmare and that tasty new energy gel could result in a mid race dash to a portaloos! Stay familiar, stay safe.

Download the Official Race App The London marathon is a supremely well organised event and that extends to its free app, which is the best way to find out your exact finish time and splits quickly, as well as tracking other runners you might know around the course.

Use Vaseline You can tackle chafing in all sorts of ways - tight base layers and 2-in-1 running shorts are a good bet. But having a trusty tub of vaseline is a time honoured solution! It's also useful for using as lip balm, as breathing hard through your mouth, even on a warm morning, for 42km will chap your lips something rotten. Popping plasters over each nipple is also an excellent preventative measure to consider.

Plan Your Routes to and From the Race Meticulously With huge crowds of people heading to the race, don't let travel become a nightmare. Work out how much time you need, then double it to be safe. Once you get to the venue, you usually still have a pretty long walk to the starting area. On the way back, time is less of an issue but plan a route with minimal walking and stairs, obviously.

Don't Attach the Timing Tag to Your Laces Cable ties will be provided with your timing tag and they are more than secure enough to keep it in place. If you attach it to your shoe with your laces, the odds are those laces will be snipped when the tag is recovered at the end of the race.

Get in the Loo Queue ASAP Just shy of 40,000 people will be running the London Marathon. That's a lot of pre race nerves, which leads to a lot of pre race dashes to the portaloos! Even if you don't think you need to go, get in the queue when you can. Chances are, by the time you make the front you'll be grateful you did! Oh and you'll probably need to go two or three times before the race starts!

Don't Forget Your Black Bin Bag Even if the weather looks great, it'll still be a bit nippy when you're in your shorts and tee waiting for the start. You'll be waiting a fair while once you've dropped your bag off so take a bin bag to use as a poncho to keep warm.

The Start is Not the Start of Your Race It can take anywhere from 2 to 40 minutes to actually cross the line after the gun sounds due to the amount of people filing through. This can be a bit stressful if you're not expecting it. Just relax and make sure you're in the right pen. Speaking of which...



....go!

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Get in the Right Starting Pen Where you start will have largely been determined in advance. There are three start zones - blue, red and green - and within those there are pens for runners expecting certain times. It's important to be with runners going at your expected pace so you don't have to dodge slower people for the first few kilometres or get swept up and set out too fast.

Don't Panic if You're Going Too Slowly at First If you do start in a crowd of people running more slowly than you'd like, it's not worth dodging around and pushing through in an attempt to up your pace. This will wear you out and you'll probably still be running slowly anyway. Go with the flow for a couple of kilometres and you'll find the crowds will start to thin out - then you can pick up the pace more easily. There's 26 miles and change to cover, so losing 30 seconds over the first couple of clicks won't kill your PB.



Don't Succumb to Adrenaline in the First 5 Miles You will feel amazing at the start of the London marathon. The excitement of the event, coupled with a week or two of tapering, means it's easy to start quicker than you planned. That's especially true between miles two to four where there are mild downhill sections. It's vital to stick with your planned pace and not let the adrenaline power you on too much. There's a lot of distance to cover. More than you think in fact.

Remember You're Going to Run More Than 26.2 Miles Bummer, right? With all the people you have to dodge, the chances of you following the most direct racing line are more or less nil. It probably won't be that much more than 26.2 miles, but it's another reason to go with the flow early, rather than weaving constantly to try to get through the starting scrum.

Don't be Afraid to Use the Toilet During the Race This might sound obvious, but if you're gunning for a time and you feel the urge to use a loo, don't fight it! Just go to the toilet - they're found every two miles on the course. Running in discomfort, with the added stress of trying to hold it in, will ruin that part of the event for you and you have a lot of distance to make up any time lost. Plus you'll feel so good after you've gone that you'll probably sprint the next bit fast enough to get back on pace anyway.

Look at the Race Map in Advance Check the race route - not to see where you'll be going, not to avoid making a wrong turn, but to find out what is on offer along the way and when. Water is available at most mile markers, but sometimes there are energy gels if you want them - it's worth using these to save on the ones you have to carry yourself.

Use the Showers on the Course Sprinklers you can run through are installed at six points along the course. Even if it's not a hot day, running through them is a refreshing experience so don't miss out - you can find out where they are in the final instructions pack.

Your GPS Tracker Will be Wrong Even in ideal conditions, consumer GPS trackers aren't perfect so you can expect the total distance it logs to be a bit out. Pace yourself with the kilometre and mile markers on the course and use your tracker as a general guide. If you're set on a certain time, grab a pacing band at the Expo or online so you see what time you need to hit at each mile without having to do the maths on the fly.

Take Headphones The London marathon is a uniquely well supported event full of incredible landmarks but the whole course doesn't involve the screaming crowds on Tower Bridge or the Mall. There are sections like the Isle of Dogs where the crowds will thin and you'll be pleased to have some music or podcasts to listen to. Some people also find the constant cheering a bit wearing, so you may want to block it out after a while anyway.

