

10-week 1hr 50minutes-plus... Half-marathon schedule

This band covers beginners and those who have been over the distance once before, in around two hours, and would now like to try for something a little faster. The schedules assume that you have already got into the running habit and are doing two or three miles at a time, about three times a week.

The important thing in this program is to build up your endurance. The pattern is to keep most of the runs to 20 or 30 minutes, which can easily be fitted into the day, but to do one long run a week. This run gradually increases in distance over the weeks.

The training volume levels out at about 22 miles a week. Spread this over four runs. On two of those days you should be running easily, recovering from the harder sessions. Don't make the mistake of thinking that more training is automatically better for you; unless your body is given a long time to adjust, putting in too much training is more likely to lead to overtiredness and injury.

I recommend that you enter some races after a few weeks, especially if you haven't raced before. Run in a 10K as if you were doing the first half of a half-marathon, without putting pressure on yourself.

By the later stages of the schedule, you should know how your body is coping with the training load. If 22 miles a week is hard work, try cutting down Week 9 to 15 miles, but otherwise you can continue at the regular volume until the last week.

In the final week we start tapering; by reducing the amount of running, you will be building up extra energy stores in your leg muscles, so that you should really feel like racing by the time the big day comes.

In this schedule, you can arrange the days as you like, though try to have a rest after a hard day. A typical pattern would be Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday, with the longest run on the Sunday.

Half-Marathon Race Preparation Nothing like as taxing as a full marathon, the 21K distance does need to be treated with respect, particularly if the weather is hot. You should finish your breakfast three hours before the start, but there is nothing wrong with drinking tea, coffee, water or squash up to an hour before the start, and if it is really hot, I suggest drinking half a pint of water five minutes before the start. Don't drink half an hour before the start, or you'll be bursting for a pee while waiting for the gun!

If you're aiming to run fast, you should go through a gentle warm-up routine during the 20 minutes leading up to the start – jogging, stretching.

BEFORE STARTING TO TRAIN FOR A HALF MARATHON, you need to possess a basic fitness level. And if you are over age 35, you probably should see your doctor for a physical examination. But assuming no major problems, most healthy people can train themselves to complete a 13.1-mile race.

The below schedule assumes you have the ability to run 3 miles, three to four times a week. If that seems difficult, consider a shorter distance for your first race--or take more time to develop an endurance base. The terms used in the training schedule are somewhat obvious.

Pace: Don't worry about how fast you run your regular workouts. Run at a comfortable pace. If you're training with a friend, the two of you should be able to hold a conversation. If you can't do that, you're running too fast. (For those wearing heart rate monitors, your target zone should be between 65 and 75 percent of your maximum pulse rate.)

Distance: The training schedule dictates workouts at distances, from 3 to 10 miles. Don't worry about running precisely those distances, but you should come close. Pick a course through the neighborhood, or in some scenic area where you think you might enjoy running. Then measure the course either by car or bicycle. In deciding where to train, talk to other runners. They probably can point you to some accurately measured courses for your workouts.

Rest: Rest is as important a part of your training as the runs. You will be able to run the long runs on the weekend better--and limit your risk of injury--if you rest before, and rest after.

Long Runs: The key to getting ready to finish a Half Marathon is the long run, progressively increasing in distance each weekend. Over a period of 10 weeks, your longest run will increase from 3 to 10 miles. Don't worry about making the final jump from 10 miles in practice to 13.1 miles in the race. Inspiration will carry you to the finish line, particularly if you taper the final week. The schedule below suggests doing your long runs on Saturdays, but you can do them Sundays, or any other convenient day, as long as you are consistent. (See "Juggling," below.)

Cross-Train: On the schedule below, this is identified simply as "cross." What form of cross-training works best? It could be swimming, cycling, walking (see below), or even some combination that could include strength training if you choose to do it on Wednesdays and Saturdays or days between your running. And feel free to throw in some jogging as well if you're feeling good. What cross-training you select depends on your personal preference. But don't make the mistake of cross-training too vigorously. Cross-training days should be considered easy days that allow you to recover from the running you do the rest of the week.

Walking: Walking is an excellent exercise that a lot of runners overlook in their training days. I don't specify walking breaks, but feel free to walk during your running workouts any time you feel tired or need to shift gears. When you go to the starting line in your tenth week, nobody will care whether you run the full Half Marathon; they're more concerned that you finish!

Stretch & Strength: You have three rest days and are the days on which I advise you to spend extra time stretching--and do some strength training too. This is actually a day of "rest" following your long run on the weekends, so don't overdo it. It's wise to stretch every day, particularly after you finish your run, but spend more time stretching on rest days. Strength training could consist of push-ups, pull-ups, use of free weights or working out with various machines at a health club. Runners generally benefit if they combine light weights with a high number of repetitions, rather than pumping very heavy iron. I also suggest that you strength train following your running workouts, however you can schedule strength training on any two convenient days.

Take Time: Does the 10-week progression from 3 to 13.1 miles seem too tough? Do you have more than a dozen weeks before your selected Half Marathon? Lengthen the schedule; take 18 or even 24 weeks to prepare. Repeat the week just completed before moving up to the next level. Don't be afraid to insert "stepback" weeks, where you actually cut your distance every second or third week to gather forces for the next push upward.

Racing: It's not obligatory, but you might want to run a 5-K or 10-K to see how you're doing--and also to experience a road race, if you have not run one before. You will be able to use your times to predict your finishing time in the half marathon, and what pace to run that race. I have suggested a 5-K race at the end of Week 6 and a 10-K race at the end of Week 9.

Juggling: Don't be afraid to juggle the workouts from day to day and week to week. If you have important things to do on a training day, do that workout on a rest day instead. If your family is going to be on vacation one week when you will have more or less time to train, adjust the schedule accordingly. Be consistent with your training, and the overall details won't matter.

Running 13.1 miles is not easy. If it were easy, there would be little challenge to an event such as the Half Marathon. Whether you plan your Half as a singular accomplishment or as a stepping stone to the even more challenging full marathon, crossing the finish line will give you a feeling of great accomplishment. Good luck with your training.

This Half Marathon training schedule is only a guide. Feel free to make minor modifications to suit your work and family schedule.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
WEEK 1	4M slow	3M slow	4M	3M, timed
WEEK 2	3M easy	3M, with a few 50m bursts	3M easy	5-6M slow
WEEK 3	4M easy	4M, with a few 100m bursts	3M, timed, plus 1M jog	7-8M slow (or 1 hour)
WEEK 4	4M easy	4M, inc several 30-sec bursts	4M	8M slow (or 1 hr)
WEEK 5	4M or 35 mins easy, off-road if possible	4-5M of fast-and-slow, with bursts up the hills (but not down them)	4M or 35 mins easy, off-road if possible	9-10M Steady
WEEK 6	3-4M easy on soft ground	1M jog, then 2 x 5 mins fast, with 5-min slow jog recovery	4M easy on grass	5 K Race
WEEK 7	3-4M easy, off-road if possible	3M, inc a few short bursts	3M on grass	11-12 M Steady Pace
WEEK 8	4-5M easy, off-road	1M jog, then 2 x 7-8 mins fast, with 5-min jog recovery	4M on grass, inc several short bursts	11-12M, as slow as you like
WEEK 9	3-4M easy, on soft ground	1M jog, then 2 x 5 mins fast, with 5-min slow jog recovery between	4M easy on grass	10 K Race
WEEK 10	3M easy, off-road	1M jog, then 1M at race speed, then 1M jog	2M jog	Race day

STRETCHING

Always stretch after a warm up never stretch a cold muscle as this may increase your chance of injury. Always stretch before and after exercise. Before will prepare the body for what's to come and after will help the body return to normal by reducing lactate levels and promote muscle recovery.



Foot alignment should be shoulder width apart you can confirm this by standing either side of a straight line on the floor.

When you take your rear foot back, it should not cross or move away from the midline, your foot should be pointing forward with your heel either flat on the floor, or raised if aiming to develop the stretch.

Your front leg should bend so that when you look down over your knee, you can see the tip of your toes. Always lean forward aiming to keep a straight line with your heel, hip and head.



1. Stand with both feet flat on the floor, pointing forward, half a stride apart.

2. Keeping your back straight, with your hands on your hips, exhale and lower yourself down, resting your bodyweight on the rear foot.



1. Stand upright, with both feet facing forward, double shoulder-width apart.

2. Place your hands on your hips, in order to keep your back straight, slowly exhale, taking your bodyweight across to one side.



1. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, one foot extended half a step forward.
2. Keeping the front leg straight, bend your rear leg, resting both hands on the bent thigh.
3. Slowly exhale, aiming to tilt both buttocks upward, keeping the front leg straight, and both feet flat on the floor, pointing forward.
4. Inhale slowly, and relax from the stretch. Repeat the stretch again, this time beginning with the toes of the front foot raised toward the ceiling, but keeping the heel on the floor.



1. Stand holding onto a secure object, or have one hand raised out to the side for balance.
2. Raise one heel up toward your buttocks, and grasp hold of your foot, with one hand.
3. Inhale, slowly pulling your heel to your buttock while gradually pushing your pelvis forward.



1. Extend one hand down the center of your back, fingers pointing downward.
2. Use the other hand to grasp the elbow.
3. Exhale slowly, pulling gently downward on your elbow, aiming to take your fingers along your spine



1. Cross one arm horizontally over your chest, grasping it with either your hand or forearm, just above the elbow joint.
2. Exhale, slowly pulling your upper arm in toward your chest.
3. Aim to keep the hips and shoulders facing forward throughout the stretch



1. Stand or sit up right, keeping your back straight, head looking forward.
2. Place both hands on your lower back, fingers pointing downward, elbows out to your side.
3. Exhale slowly while gently pulling the elbows back, aiming to get them to touch.



1. Adopt a position on all fours, point your fingers forward and your toes behind.
2. Start with a flat back, and then drop your head downward, pushing your shoulder blades upward and outward as you elevate your upper back.



1. Lie on your back, keeping your head on the floor.
2. Slowly pull both legs into your chest, and secure them there by wrapping your arms around the back of your knees.
3. Exhale, pulling down on your legs while gradually lifting your buttocks off the floor.
4. You can stretch your neck, once in this position, by slowly tilting your chin to your chest.



1. Lie on your back, extending your left arm out to the side, while taking your left leg over your right, bringing the knee inline with the hips.
2. Keeping your right leg straight, use your right arm to push down on the knee of the left leg, exhaling slowly as you stretch.



1. Begin the stretch by laying on your front, with your hands close to your chest, fingers pointing upward.
2. Exhale, pushing yourself up with your arms and contracting your buttocks while keeping both feet firmly on the floor.
3. Look up toward the ceiling, to also feel the stretch in your neck



1. Lie comfortably on your back, concentrating on keeping both your head and buttocks in contact with the floor.
2. Slowly extend one leg upward, grasping it with both hands, either around the calf, the hamstrings, or a combination of both.
3. Aim to pull your leg toward your chest, keeping it straight. When the tension builds up in your hamstrings, relax the stretch a little by contracting your quadriceps on the same leg.



1. Sit on the floor, with one leg straight, toes pointing upward.
2. Cross the other foot over the knee of the straight leg, aiming to place that foot flat on the floor.
3. Place the elbow and forearm of the opposite arm of the bent leg on the outside of the bent knee.
4. Exhale, slowly pulling the bent knee across your body.



1. Interlock your fingers above your head, palms facing upward.
2. Exhale and push your hands further above your head.
3. You will also feel this stretch in your shoulders.

Fartlek Training

A fartlek session can be either the easiest or hardest thing you do all week. It's a Swedish term meaning 'speed play', and it basically consists of fast, medium and slow running over a variety of distances. However this will improve your aerobic capacity, this should be carried out as a substitute for a run day from weeks 1-6.

Here's how a typical fartlek session would work. After a steady warm-up, simply pick a landmark – for example a tree, lamp-post, or phone box – and run to it hard, then jog until you've recovered. Then pick another landmark, run hard to that, recover and so on.

There doesn't need to be a set structure to the run. For your first quick burst you might choose a target that's just 100m away and sprint to it flat out. Then for the next hard run you'll see something 800m away and stride towards it at your 5K race pace.

It's entirely up to you how hard or easy you make the session. Unlike track intervals, fartlek doesn't require you to set a distance to run, or a time to recover. A watch isn't necessary (although in the absence of landmarks you can use one to pick different times for your hard sections), as you listen to your body to determine your recoveries. After a hard spurt, jog until you've got your breath back, the lactic acid has drained from your legs, and your heart's stopped thumping. Then go again.

If you want to add a bit of specificity, short, fast bursts will help you sharpen your pure speed, which is most important for races like 5Ks and 10Ks. Longer periods of speed help to raise your anaerobic threshold, which improves your speed endurance – ideal for 10-milers and half-marathons. In reality, though, both of these components contribute to good race performances at any distance from the mile to the marathon, so it's best to mix and match the length of the bursts.