

## RECOVERING AFTER A MARATHON

It's kind of funny and very predictable, but when I meet with runners who want to hire me to coach them through a marathon, they often talk of a timeline right up until the marathon they've chosen. Maybe this is due to looking at how to best spend the monthly fee on coaching, but more than likely it has to do with runners who often don't think beyond the big day. I typically inform them that they may want to keep me on board about another month after the marathon, because there is a method to the madness of recovery. Fortunately I'm not hurting for business, so I don't advise this to get an extra buck... I advise this because a good recovery has a lot to do with how quickly you can meet your next set of running goals.

I think most people have the idea that once the race is over, you just lay on the couch and do whatever you feel like until you're back up to snuff. That kind of thinking will help you recover, naturally, but you'll recover more slowly and you won't be as ready for your next big race if you do it that way.

First, let's talk about what to do immediately after the race that will help. **WALK!** That's right, walk. I know you just covered 26.2 miles, but now you've got to cover some more. This is simply "active rest". It is walking out some of the lactic acid that has built up during your marathon. Walk for at least 10 minutes afterwards so your body has time to eliminate the lactic acid. During this walk, begin taking in **HIGH Glycemic Index (HGI)** carbohydrates (sugar). When your glycogen cells have become depleted, they will suck up any amount of HGI carbs your body can offer after an event like this. Getting your glycogen stores back to square one is the first step back to recovery. Eat all the fruit and goodies at the finish line. But eat them on the fly—grab a soda and a banana and walk it out. After your walk, continue on with more HGI eating. You want to take in HGI carbs up until 90 minutes after you've completed your race. After this, take in **LOW Glycemic Index (LGI)** carbohydrates (brown rice) the rest of the day. Let your body decide when you've had enough. Don't forget about protein. Your body needs it to begin its muscle cell repair process. After you've cleaned up, simply go out and have a nice balanced meal for lunch.

Back to what you need to do immediately following the race... After you've walked some and had some sugar, get a post-race **MASSAGE**. I can't emphasize enough how important this is. Your body will begin to recover immediately if you do this. I took full advantage of this after the Paul deBruyn 30K, and was surprised at how many people didn't. It's such a huge step. Just 10-15 minutes is all you need, and have the therapist spend most of that time on your quads, hamstrings, and calves.

What's next? I have my athletes basically follow a reverse taper. Sure you can do nothing, but again, you'll recover faster and be able to race again sooner if you put a little structured rest back into it. So the week following, I typically tell my athletes to take 2-3 full days off (walking is optional but with no real time guidelines). After that, I'll again have them follow a reverse taper. So if they were doing 20 minute easy runs the week of the marathon, they'll be doing a couple of 20 minute easy runs the week after a marathon. The key word is easy. I do anaerobic threshold testing with my athletes so I can really define where they need to be. And this is one of the

critical times for this. Zone 1 is considered to be the “Active Rest” zone. And this zone is a very low percentage of the Anaerobic Threshold, in which you are burning only fat for fuel. Studies have shown that exercising in this zone will actually speed up recovery by flushing lactic acid out of the muscles and by promoting healing (bringing blood) to the muscles so they’ll recover more quickly. If you don’t know your “AT”, then you can estimate it by training at 60% of your maximum heart rate, which is very, very easy. For most people, it is the equivalent of a walk pace or an easy spin on the bicycle. After the first week, simply continue to reverse the taper for the rest of the month after a marathon.

Also during this first week of recovery, get a full body massage. Your body will be feeling very SORE about 2-3 days after the marathon. This is probably when the soreness will peak. It’s best to have a massage during this time. Each week after the first recovery week, begin to add a few minutes or miles (whichever you track) until back to “base” volume. Don’t do any anaerobic work for at least a month after the marathon, and maybe longer, depending on the next race goal. If I have an athlete that is going to do a shorter race (they really want to or plan to), I’ll have them do some easy strides of shorter distances at the track just to try to stimulate some leg speed, but for the most part, speed work is not recommended for at least a month.

After a month of recovery, I’ll typically get an athlete to start a new cycle. This means picking a new goal and start building up again. For many, this means another marathon a year from then. If this is the case, I’ll encourage them to just remain status quo with their base training until they get a lot closer. Again, it really depends on that person’s goal. Doing some shorter races after a month or so of recovery is fine. Don’t expect to PR though. Your body takes far more of a beating than you realize when you run a marathon. I don’t advise running another marathon for at least four months after you’ve finished your last one. And that’s even pushing it. It’s fairly common because some like to qualify for Boston in December or January and then run Boston in April. This is doable, but you’ll find that their fastest races were done in qualifying (in most cases---there are exceptions to everything), and doing Boston is a well earned victory lap! For those who know me, they know that I did two marathons about a month apart a couple of years ago. This was simply out of frustration. I didn’t listen to my own advice, and I paid the price. It took me at least a year to get back to running the times I was running prior to the first marathon of that string. I really paid the price in recovery both mentally and physically. Ideally, it’s best to wait at least six months, but four is acceptable if you want do another marathon. Personally, one per year works for me (now).

When will your speed come back so you can get back into the 5K circuit? Well, if you’ve done the steps to recovery stated above, you can expect them back once you’ve gone through the cycle again. In other words, you must peak to reach your best, and peaking is the final step. So after you’ve recovered, you need to work on your base again (doing all aerobic miles and minutes) for a month or two, and then start doing your speed work after that. After about two months of speed work, you should be back to your fastest times. So you’re looking at around 4-5 months. Yes this is a long road back, but by doing it this way you won’t get burned out or injured, and you will reach your peak. If you continue to just run hard as soon as you feel up to it, it will catch up to you. You’ll pull it off for awhile, but eventually it will grab you. Relax and be patient. If you trained hard and peaked, you’ve earned a few months of coming back. Use it as a time to really appreciate all the work you put into earning that finisher medal.