

How to Get Faster

A list of everything you can do to put it all together when it counts

To get faster for a certain race means that you will have to peak which can last for up to a month if you're looking at doing a series of shorter races. So, this means that you will only be this fast for a short period of time. You can reach a plateau of decent fitness and become relatively fast by running. But, you can only peak by training. It requires you to train your body which involves appropriately stressing it within the pace range guidelines of each type of workout and making sure you do the right things to recover enough. Meanwhile, you have the opportunity to work on all the related areas that will help optimize your training. Finally, even if you pick the right race at the right time of the year and have your training go well, you still need a little luck in the form of good weather and a fortunate life situation (i.e. low enough stress so you can get enough sleep and rest).

Here are some things to consider and I've also attempted to quantify how much time they're approximately worth off your time compared to not changing a thing. For simplicity's sake, I'll talk about how much time it'll take off your marathon, but you can use this formula to compare the time off for other race distances:

Marathon = 1 minute faster Half Marathon = 20-30 seconds faster
10K = 10-15 seconds faster 5K = 5-7 seconds faster

Go slow when it's time to go slow to prepare for the workout and recover from it.

*depending on how much you don't start, finish, and go slower when you're supposed to, this can chop 1-5 minutes off your marathon time since you'll have fresher legs (even more if you get injured or overtrained).

-Warm up: Start out 4-5 minutes per mile slower than 5K race pace for 10 minutes/1 mile and ease into a pace that's no faster than 3 minutes per mile slower than 5K race pace for the next 5-10 minutes/2nd mile to let your body become efficient and effective before doing the meat of your workout.

-Cool/Warm down: 3-5 minutes per mile slower than 5K race pace for the last 5-10 minutes to begin flushing out the junk in your legs for the next workout.

-Recovery jog after speed/hill workout repeats: Can practically crawl, the slower the better to recover in a timely manner for the next repeat. If it's warm out, can walk to allow for cooling off as well as recovery.

-Recovery runs: 3-4 minutes per mile slower than 5K race pace to adequately flush out the junk in your legs and be ready to roll for the next long/hill/goal pace/speed workout. Meanwhile, you'll still get endurance benefits. Enjoy the fact that you are encouraged to go super slow and relish these opportunities to chill out.

Go appropriately fast when it's time to go fast to provide the right amount of stress to improve speed

*depending on how much faster you go than you're supposed to, this can chop 1-5 minutes off your marathon time since your body will be better prepared (even more if you get injured or overtrained).

*Please note: we address these and combine multiple types of speed workouts for our speed sessions. Contact me if interested in finding out more at runnersedge@everestkc.net

-V02/Boost lung power: 10-15 seconds per mile faster than 5K race pace for ½ mile repeats / 5K race pace for 1 mile repeats – all on flat terrain like a track or trail. Recovery jog for 75 to 100% of the time it took you to run the repeat (i.e. jogging 3-4 minutes after doing a ½ mile repeat in 4 minutes). 2 to 5 miles worth of repeats or no more than 10% of your weekly mileage - should be done every other week due to its demanding nature or no more than 3 out of every 4 weeks.

-Tempo/Boost waste product clearing efficiency: 10K race pace, or 20 seconds per mile slower than 5K race pace for 1-2 mile repeats with a recovery jog of 10-20% of the time it took to run the repeat (i.e. jogging 1-2 minutes if it took 10 minutes to do the repeat). Or, 30-40 seconds per mile slower than 5K race pace for a 3-4 mile tempo run. Up to 2 to 4 miles worth weekly.

-Running Economy/Boost leg turnover: 30-40 seconds per mile faster than 5K race pace for ¼ mile repeats with a recovery jog 1-2 times longer than it took you to run the repeat (i.e. jogging 2-3 minutes after doing a ¼ mile repeat). 1-2 miles worth no more than once every 2-3 weeks.

-Striders/Boost raw speed: Pick it up to near top speed for 15-20 seconds followed by a 40 second super slow recovery jog. Do 4 to 8 of these once or twice a week after you've warmed up or before you cool down.

-Goal pace runs: Practice half marathon or marathon race pace enough so that you'll be able to easily tune into that rhythm on race day. This is specificity of training at its best. Can add goal pace miles up to 2 runs a week. 1-5 miles on your medium weekly run and 2 to 12 miles on your long run (no more than 7 for a half marathon).

*As you can see, everything is predicated on an accurate assessment of your speed. The 5K works best since you can find a couple of races each weekend. Re-assess your speed every 4-6 weeks with a race or 2 mile time trial (find a track, warm up, and run 2 miles as fast as you can) and adjust your pace ranges accordingly.

*It's a waste of time to go faster for any of these workouts since you're not applying the appropriate stress for your body to get stronger, especially for goal pace runs. Set a healthy range of a certain pace + or - 7 seconds and stick to it as much as you can when factoring in the weather and terrain.

Work on endurance for medium and long runs

*depending on how much faster you go than you're supposed to, this can chop 1-5 minutes off your marathon time since you will have greater endurance (even more if you get injured or overtrained).

Reputable coaches across the board typically recommend going about 2 minutes per mile slower than 5K race pace for medium and long runs (if you follow the F.I.R.S.T. program recommended by Runner's World, you'll need to spend more time actively recovering to reap the benefits of their more aggressive pace). 3 main types of runs are the settle into a nice rhythm run, the run with added goal pace miles in the middle or end, and the progressive run where you start slow (3 minutes per mile slower than 5K race pace) and gradually pick it up to race pace (or, about 1 minute per mile slower than 5K race pace) by the end. It's good to mix it up and do all 3 types. Remember that since you are doing speed workouts to work on speed, the longer runs are more for endurance, or time spent running - i.e. instead of bragging how fast you can do your long runs, be proud of how long it took you to do them. You'll need to be strong in this area for the last 1/3 of the race.

Boost your strength to carry your weight

*depending on how weak you are, particularly in the core area, this can chop 1-5 minutes off your marathon time since you will be more efficient (even more if you get injured).

*Please note: we address the hill workouts, sprints, and drills in our speed sessions and the core/general exercises in our Runner's Edge boot camp. Contact me if interested in finding out more at runnersedge@everestkc.net

-Hill workouts/repeats: Can do hill repeats or a hilly run where you push the pace on the ups. Go at 5K-10K race effort on hills that take less than 2 minutes to climb or half marathon race effort on hills that take longer than that to climb. No more than 15-20 minutes of climbing time per week, start low with 5-10 minutes of climb time and gradually build up to this. Recovery jog as long as you need before the next hill.

-Hill sprints: Find a moderate to steep hill that takes 5 to 15 seconds to climb. Start with a 1-2 repeats and build up to 8-12 repeats once a week or every other week. Go near top effort on the way up and walk back down taking as long as you need to fully recover before the next repeat. *Definitely be very warmed up before doing this.

-Running Drills: High knees, Butt kickers, bounders, 1 leg hops, 2 leg hops, and backwards running performed on grass or a track are excellent ways to improve strength to your running muscles. These can be done 1-2 times a week with each exercise lasting 15-30 seconds with a near to full recovery before the next drill.

-Run barefoot or in minimalist shoes: Run on soccer fields, a track, or artificial turf without shoes once a week for 5-20 minutes (start with 5 and gradually build up) as part of one of your runs or run in minimalist shoes like the Vibrams, Nike Free, or racing flats once a week for your recovery runs to strengthen your foot and lower leg muscles.

-Core exercises: Your hips/abs/back/glutes are the foundation for your strength. Anything that works this area will help you run with less effort for a given pace.

-General exercises: Lower and upper body exercises will complement your core strength. Using implements that force your stability muscles to assist your main muscles like the gym and medicine ball, kettlebell, bosu ball, therabands, rubber tubing, and free weights as well as just using your own body as the resistance will give you more bang for your buck – as long as you focus on proper form and don't overdo it.

Lighten the load

*depending on how much excess fat you have to lose and ounces you can safely shave off your shoes, this can chop 1 to 25 minutes (or even more than that) off your marathon time since you'll go faster with a lighter load to carry for a given effort.

Body Weight - Keep eating the healthy stuff, but lessen the amount of unhealthy stuff – it all comes back to calories consumed vs. calories burned. Move more by doing the little things (stairs vs. elevator, park further away) but also by adding cross training to your running routine. Men can go 1 minute faster per pound of excess fat lost in a marathon while women can go up to 2 minutes faster per pound of excess fat lost. To help with a healthy weight loss nutrition plan, contact Nutritionist Sally Brown (sbrown@ebodyfuel.com). Be careful in restricting calories too much if you are doing heavy training – it's safer to focus on this before you ramp up your training.

Shoe Weight - Shaving an ounce off your shoes is equivalent to shaving a pound of excess fat off your body since your foot is at the end of 2 levers (your upper and lower leg) traveling 20-30 miles an hour in an arc while you run 7 to 11 minute pace. Invest in some lightweight trainers or racing flats. Test them out in speed workouts and save them for your races. Be careful on getting too light of a shoe depending on your weight and injury history since you'll sacrifice some cushioning and support. However, most people can get a shoe that weighs a couple of ounces lighter.

Become more efficient with your running form

*depending how poor your current form is, this can chop 1 to 5 minutes off your marathon time since you'll waste less energy for a given pace

Record the next race on TV and watch the elite runners in slow motion. You'll notice that nearly all of them keep a compact arm swing which helps them avoid over striding (the further out your hand goes out in front of you, the further out your opposite foot lands which puts undue stress on the heel and actually causes a minor braking action). Try to keep your hands closer to your torso while swinging and this will allow you to land mid-foot to disperse the pounding from running more evenly between the heel and ball of the foot. For a more detailed analysis of your own running form, I recommend meeting with Physical Therapist Jack Cady (www.stridemechanics.com)

Replenish during to avoid an 'empty gas tank'

*depending on how little you drink and take in, this can chop 2-15 minutes off your marathon time since you have more energy to consume and water to cool off with. Those with high sweat rates should look at this in terms of cutting their losses as they'll slow down less by drinking as much as they healthfully can.

Figure out what works best for you during your workouts. The longer the race, the more this will play a crucial role in your performance. Taking in water only will suffice for races lasting 1 hour or less (water is optional for races under 30 minutes). You'll need water and sports drink for races lasting 1-2 hours. For anything longer, you'll need extra amounts of glucose and electrolytes – gels/blocks/sports beans/bars and electrolyte caps. The average person can handle 1 of these every 4 miles, but experiment with what works best for you in varying weather conditions.

*Sweat rate – Many people that struggle in longer races have a high sweat rate. Because the body can absorb up to 20-30 ounces per hour, those with higher sweat rates (people in our group have been measured with rates of losing up to 40-60 ounces per hour) will slow down as they get more dehydrated. It's good to know your limitations. A simple

test is to empty your bladder and weigh yourself naked. Go for an hour run by warming up 15 minutes and then settle into marathon goal pace without drinking or eating anything. As soon as you finish, towel off, and weigh yourself naked again. For every pound lost, that's 16 ounces. Try to replenish up to 30 ounces of that per hour on future runs and races.

Refuel in between to start out the next workout with a full tank of gas

*depending on how little you refuel after a workout, this can chop 1-3 minutes off your marathon time since you'll have fresher legs to work with.

The optimal time to refuel is within 30-60 minutes after a workout as a higher percentage of what you take in will be stored in muscle glycogen (and less as fat!). Eat something light before long runs and longer races to start off replenished.

Race to become a better racer

*depending on how infrequently you race and are not in tune with how much you're truly willing to push yourself, this can chop 1-5 minutes off your marathon time due to being more experienced and calloused in dealing with pain.

Doing a tune up race every 4-6 weeks will help you figure out how to handle the stress of race day and learn how to get the most out of your body & mind while gaining valuable race experience. Besides, this is the BEST speed workout you can get.

Be willing to engage during the moments of truth

*depending on how much you prefer to stay within your comfort zone, this can chop 1-5 minutes off your marathon time due to being more effective at dealing with pain.

Instead of dreading the pain of pushing yourself, welcome it as an opportunity to see if you 'pass the test' on mental toughness. The more you put yourself in this situation, the better you'll become at figuring out how best to handle and even thrive on it. Tune up races are the best opportunities to get better in this area followed by speed workouts.

Intelligent race tactics

*taken together, these tactics can chop 3 to 15 minutes off your marathon time depending on how much you don't utilize them

-Warm up: The shorter the race, the longer the warmup. Marathons can have warm-ups built into the first few miles while you should be completely warmed up before the start of all other distances. Remember, you are not efficient until you have warmed up – otherwise, you lose valuable nutrients and water exponentially and needlessly which will catch up to you later. Ask yourself how long it takes to be fully in the zone for your routine runs and warm up that long before races – typically, at least 30-45 minutes of running before 5K's and 10K's and 15-30 minutes before half marathons.

-Ease into the race: Even if you are warmed up and feel great, feel like you're holding back just a little in the first mile before deciding how much more aggressive to get after that. You'll be in control of the most options by starting out this way (pick it up, hold the pace, or slow down a little). Psychologically, you'll also be hungry to push yourself longer into the race and pass people.

-Hit all the tangents: The person who certifies the course hits all the tangents and so should you if you want to run the actual distance.

-Tuck in behind folks with a headwind/spread out with a tailwind: It's worth your effort to surge and tuck in behind a pack in front of you which will save you lots of energy. But, you should take advantage of the sailboat effect and find some space when the wind is helping you.

-Be conservative on the uphill/aggressive on the downhill: Since hills take more than they give you, you'll lose the battle. Therefore, run by even effort and slow naturally on the uphill. By doing so, you'll recover faster and will be able to get away with pushing the downs harder.

*Also, don't forget that it's not over until your over – don't let up on an uphill until you have momentum or gravity helping you out again. Giving up near the top will slow you down exponentially.

-Run with a pack: If you can find someone or a pace group to run with, you'll be able to feed off the synergy of the group and achieve more.

-Drink enough through the aid stations: You will use every drop you take in until the final 30 minutes of the race when the aid stations will start to help you more for afterwards. Don't rush through the aid stations to the point where you don't take enough in, especially in the early going as it will always come back to haunt you. Take 15-30 second brisk walk breaks to make sure you get fluids in you rather than on you.

-Use planned brisk walk breaks for races longer than 3 hours: This can help turn a marathon into 20 x 1 mile repeats with a 30-60 second brisk walk break after each (mile marker or aid station) to stay fresher for the last 6.2 miles. The vast majority of people who use proactive planned walk breaks slow down a lot less in the final 1/3 of the race than those who run until they're forced to walk. *This is particularly true when temperatures get above 60 degrees.

Choose the right race at the right time

*training in warm weather for a cool weather race as well as one that is gently rolling can chop 3-10 minutes off compared to training in cool weather for a warm race or a hilly race.

On average, training through the spring and summer for a fall race will yield the best results as will picking a gently rolling or net downhill course with moderately rolling terrain race with typically cool conditions. Of course, factor in when you'll have the most time to train.

Get acclimated: If training for a race that will have temps above 50 degrees or will be warmer than what you've been training in, it's important to start later in the day since sunlight adds 10 degrees to the air temperature and/or wear an extra layer or two. It takes at least 2 weeks to train your body to become more efficient at keeping itself cooled off.

The longer you stay healthy, the higher your peak

*Depending on the severity and when you get injured, this can chop 1 to 15 minutes off since you'll be healthy

Be careful in how much you take on in training. See everything as an experiment and adjust as your body dictates (i.e. listen to your body!). It's better to be healthy and 10% undertrained than 1% overtrained. Be proactive with preventive maintenance like massages and nip any injuries in the bud by stopping running immediately (cross train instead) and seeking health professionals.

Build in a recovery period during the week, month, and after your target race to rejuvenate.

*Depending on how little you rest, this can chop 1-5 minutes off since you'll have fresher legs

Take the easy days and weeks as seriously as the other days and weeks. Regroup with several weeks of nothing or easy running/cross training to avoid long term burnout. A novice runner can get up to 7-10 years of improvement.

You recover the most during sleep so get enough of it

*Depending on how sleep deprived you are, this can chop 1 to 10 minutes off since you'll be more refreshed

This is a very overlooked area for folks wanting to be in peak condition on race day. Often, this is the culprit if someone cannot understand why they didn't do better if they're training and race conditions were good. 1 hour of sleep before midnight is worth 2 hours of sleep after midnight. If you can get up relatively easy when the alarm goes off, you're getting enough sleep. If not, figure out what you need to do to get more of it.

Factor in life stress when deciding your training & race plans

*Depending on how much stress you're dealing with, running within your limitations can cut your losses by 1 to 5 minutes off since you're less likely to overdo it

Too much stress, both good and bad will siphon energy needed to train. The more you're dealing with, the less you have to work with when it comes to running. Adjust your schedule accordingly day to day, week to week, and month to month to avoid burnout or over training.