

## 1: Choosing the Right Running Program for your Next Race

A short while ago my friend excitedly announced that she had signed up for her first ½ marathon, and had downloaded a training program from the internet. She then asked “Do you think running 5x/week is too much for me?” This is a beginner runner, mother of 2 preschoolers, working full-time, and running purely for enjoyment. She thought she had to run 5x/week to make it through a ½ marathon! I do not recommend using generic run programs, as I find that there are too many variables with each runner. Some of the generic programs in books and on the internet may be excellent, but how do you know if they are right for you? Hopefully this article will answer some of these questions and help you choose a program that is right for you.

Before you start thinking about “how much to run” you should be thinking about “how to run”. You may be able to shave minutes off your times and prevent injury by making some technique changes. If you don’t have an experienced, educated coach to evaluate your run technique then I suggest you start by watching “Evolution Running”. I have been teaching many of the concepts to my runners and have seen their race times decrease as a result.

### The Unfit or Fit Beginner

Your 20-year old glory story is insignificant. If you have had an extended break from running then you need to start out like a beginner! The “fit beginner” is active in physical pursuits and can usually progress quicker and less painfully than the “unfit beginner”. The “unfit beginner” is coming directly off the couch, so has to slowly increase elastic energy storage, cardiovascular, and respiratory system endurance.

### The Experienced Runner

I assume that if you categorize yourself as “experienced” then you have been running consistently and injury free for at least a season. If you are training to race and are willing to train outside of your comfort zone, then I recommend that you follow the guidelines I have suggested in Table 1. My athletes have had the most success with a 3-4x/week run program along with a 2x/week strength program. If this is your first run season then I would recommend one speedwork session per week instead of two.

*Please see page 2 for training table.*

### Further Recommendations

- \* Progress your long runs by 10% time (eg. This week = 1 hour; next week 1:06 etc.). If you need to progress at a faster rate then do so cautiously!
- \* Balance your external stresses. Most “overtrained” athletes have one thing in common - a perceived high stress load in their daily life. If you can’t control these stresses then you may need to drop your run volume temporarily.
- \* Enjoy your recovery! Stretch well and book a massage to loosen up those tight muscles.
- \* Don’t let yourself down on race day! Plan your nutrition & hydration if you are running longer than 10 km. My website contains an endurance nutrition review that may be helpful. [www.valburke.com](http://www.valburke.com).

These recommendations will hopefully help you in your running quest. I have found that Jeff Galloway’s “Galloway’s Book on Running” & “Marathon-You can do it” are good books for beginners, and Jack Daniels’ “Daniels’ Running Formula” is a good book for experienced runners.

Table 1. Training Guidelines for Beginner & Experienced Runners

Suggested Training	Beginner Runner	Experienced Runner
<b>Days per Week</b>	2-3x -Day off between runs	3-6x Alternate: 1 Long Comfy run with 1 Med-Long Tempo run bi-weekly 2 x speed sessions per week (1 x intervals, 1 x pick-ups) *Additional runs medium distance and comfy pace.
<b>Intensity</b> <b>*How Fast to Run</b>	Comfortable. Start with run:walk. Run until breathing is laboured, then walk until you catch your breath. Repeat.	Varies. Long slow runs are comfy and speed-work is fast (uncomfy!). If you try to run fast every run you won't have the strength to do speedwork properly, and therefore increase your threshold & VO <sub>2</sub> max.  If you are unsure if you are running at the proper intensity, buy a heart rate monitor and get an EXPERIENCED coach/exercise physiologist to give you accurate training zones (age-predicted heart rate zones may not be accurate for you).
<b>Time</b>	Start where you are adapted to start. If unsure, try 30 minutes.  Unfit beginners would start at 30 mins. Run 2 mins: walk 2 mins throughout - total running time = 15 mins	The long runs start where you are currently ready to start and progress weekly or bi-weekly.  Example of progressing Long Runs: 10 km - Long run builds to 1 - 1 ½ hrs ½ Marathon - Long run builds to 1 ½ - 2 ¾ hrs Marathon - Long run builds to 2 ½ - 3 ½ hrs *Final long run 2-3 weeks prior to race day.
<b>Other Advice</b>	Run:walk progressed so that eventually you are running the time.  Eg. run 2: walk 2; run 3: walk 1; run 5: walk 1; run 10: walk 1 etc.	<b>Recommended Speedwork:</b>  Intervals: 1 km (1:1 work:rest ratio) and/or 2 km repeats (1:5 work:rest ratio)  Eg: If 1 km = 4 ½ mins, then recover 4 ¾ mins between each interval. Eg. 5-7 x 1 km intervals  Pick-ups: Warm up at comfy pace, then 5, 7, 9 min fast (5 min EZ jog between each), finish run at comfy pace. Eg. 8 km run