

Meningitis  
now

# Training Guide

## Half Marathon





## So, you've signed up for a half marathon?

Running 13.1 miles is no small challenge and it takes a fair amount of physical and mental training and preparation - but don't panic! By breaking your training down into manageable chunks, you'll be giving yourself a great chance of achieving your goal, whether it's running your first ever race or beating your personal best. Don't be put off by something that's further ahead in the plan than you are; whatever stage you're at now, you're not expected to be where you want to be before you've even started!

This guide will talk you through everything you'll need to get you race-ready, including:

- Gear**                   What footwear and clothing to look for
- Fuel**                    Tips and recommendations for nutrition and hydration
- Race week**            What you can expect in the run-up to, and during, the main event
- Training**              Tips and guidance, plus 13-week plans for beginner and advanced runners

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# Gear

Running is a relatively inexpensive sport that needs very little specialist kit. If you've been running for a while you have probably amassed quite a good collection already, but if you're a new runner there are a few considerations that will help to make your experience a good one.

## Shoes

Your shoes are the one bit of kit that you should really try and get right. The initial cost might seem high, but it's completely worth the investment to avoid injuries and niggles that could affect you more than just financially. A specialist sports retailer will be able to provide you with a gait analysis to assess your running style and the way that your feet land and recommend suitable trainers. Try out a few different pairs and go for comfort over style.

## Top

Your running top should be relatively close-fitting, lightweight, breathable and moisture-wicking. Mid- to top-range tops - like our Meningitis Now branded technical vests - will keep you warm or cool depending on when or how you wear them, with good air circulation and quick-dry fabric.

If the weather gets really cold or wet it's also worth investing in a good quality waterproof running jacket. Cheaper options are available, but they may not be as windproof or waterproof as more technical jackets.

## Sports bra

Ladies, it's important to wear a sports bra that gives adequate support while still being comfortable. There are a lot of great sports bras around and everyone is different; you may need to try a few different options before finding the right one for you.

The ideal bra fits snugly without any bulges around the sides; the shoulder straps shouldn't dig in; and when you run there should be minimal movement.

## Socks

Any sports socks will be fine, but if you're prone to blisters or prefer extra cushioning, specialist running socks are designed with more padding in certain areas (so are specific to the left or right foot) and wick moisture away from your skin.

## Shorts / leggings

The length of your legwear is very much a personal choice and there are pros and cons to each style. In hot weather, shorts are great for allowing the blood in your legs to stay cooler but, depending on factors like the style and your body shape, may ride up in between your legs and cause chaffing. Leggings will keep you warmer and thus reduce the risk of injury in the cold but similarly could cause you to overheat. Either way, legwear should be comfortable, lightweight and ideally made of a Lycra and / or moisture-wicking material.

## Gloves

Non-essential, but gloves can certainly help if you suffer from cold extremities. Woollen gloves will do the trick, but if you're running in the rain a lot then lightweight synthetic fabrics will dry a lot quicker. Some versions will offer waterproofing as well.

## Hat

Similar to gloves, woollen - or better still, fleece - hats can help to take the chill off during the colder months. Caps also offer good protection from rain, snow and sun, especially if you wear glasses.

# Fuel

There are a lot of articles and theories around nutrition and hydration, but here are a few basics that will help to aid and enhance your running experience.

## Stay hydrated

You should be drinking plenty of water - around 2 litres - throughout the day anyway, but adding exercise into your routine calls for a higher water intake, with the main focus on post-workout.

## Refuel - but don't overeat

A common misconception is that you can eat whatever you like after you've been for a run, but be mindful of your calorie consumption. If you find you're more hungry than usual after going for a run, first make sure that you're well hydrated and then opt for healthy snacks like fruit, nuts, rice cakes with peanut butter and homemade flapjacks.

## Keep it balanced

There's so much information out there about fancy diets and carb-cycling, but there's no need to overcomplicate things; as long as you're eating a balanced, healthy variety of food you will feel the benefits in your running. If you've got a long run ahead of you then you may wish to eat more carbohydrates in the run-up; wholewheat pasta the night before a race is perfect as it tops up your muscles' energy stores and releases the energy steadily rather than all in one go and then causing your blood sugar to crash.

## Power up

Your body needs good quality training fuel and eating 2-3 hours before a run will ensure you have enough energy to get you through. Any sooner and you may find yourself battling with stomach pain (or worse...).

## Supplement

If you're finding yourself struggling with your energy levels during runs lasting 60 minutes or longer, it might be worth having a go with energy gels. There are all sorts of brands and flavours available and not everyone gets on with them, so if you do decide to use them make sure you try them out during training rather than waiting until race day.

If you're doing fine without them, great!



# Training

## Health checklist

Before you get stuck in with your training, it's a good idea to make sure there aren't any medical reasons why you shouldn't take on an exercise programme. Have a look at the checklist below and if you answer 'Yes' to some or all of the questions and you have any concerns, we advise you to make an appointment with your GP and request a check-up.

If you answer 'No' to all of these questions or have the all-clear from your GP, it's time to get going!

	YES	NO
Are you aged over 30 and / or haven't exercised for some time?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you suffer from any medical conditions?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you smoke, or have you recently given up?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you undergone any surgery in the past two years?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you currently suffering from any injuries?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you currently take any prescribed medication?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you unsure about beginning an exercise programme?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## When to train

Everyone has a preferred time to exercise and ultimately, there is no right or wrong time as long as it works for you. It doesn't even have to be the same time each time; for example, you may choose to do your longer runs in the morning on a weekend so that it frees up the rest of your day, but all other runs in an evening. Just make sure that you're giving your body enough time to rest and recover between sessions.

## Where to train

Generally speaking, nowhere is out of bounds, whether you stay indoors on the treadmill or run around the pavements, roads, paths and parks locally. That said, the transition from treadmill to road can be tricky so keep the terrain of your goal race in mind and try and stick to similar during training.

# Training

## Structuring your sessions

To get the most out of your running, regardless of whether it's during training or on race day itself, you should follow correct exercise protocols to avoid injury.

### 1. Warm up

Spend at least five minutes raising your heart rate, get blood flowing to your muscles and preparing your body and mind to the exercise that you're about to undertake. This can be as simple as a brisk walk or very easy jog.

### 2. Mobilise

Perform a few dynamic stretches; that is, lengthen your muscles and loosen your joints without holding a stretch. Think of this as though your muscles are a piece of Blu Tack; if you try to stretch them out too much when they're cold they will snap, whereas slowly warming and manipulating them first will make them much easier to work with.

### 3. Main session

This is the bulk of your training session; either a timed or distance run.

### 4. Cool down

Bring your heart rate and body temperature back down steadily to flush waste by-products from your muscles and tissues to allow for a much faster recovery. Jogging or walking for around 10 minutes is ideal.

### 5. Flexibility

Now you can hold those stretches! Your muscles should be nicely relaxed following your run and stretching properly will help you avoid cramp, muscle tears and stiffness. Spend 5 to 10 minutes in total.

#### Top tip:

Need some inspiration? Check out the videos on our Training Hub by Meningitis Now's resident runner and qualified personal trainer, Rachel, for some great mobilisation and flexibility exercises.



# Training

## Picking the right guide

Our 13-week plans are designed to help you achieve your goal, whether you're a newcomer to half marathons or seen your fair share and want to beat your best time.

**Top tip:** If you've never run before, take a look at our **Couch to 5k plan** first before undertaking any further distances. This will build you up gradually from not running at all to running consistently for 30 minutes, over the space of nine weeks. If you can manage 5k but haven't ever gone further, our **10k plan** will help you to strengthen your running foundation before you start to increase your distance further.

BEGINNER	
You've been running for less than 12 months	<input type="radio"/>
You can run for at least 60 minutes	<input type="radio"/>
You're training for your first half marathon	<input type="radio"/>
ADVANCED	
You've been running for at least 12 months	<input type="radio"/>
You've completed a number of shorter events, including 10km	<input type="radio"/>
You've already completed at least one half marathon and want to improve	<input type="radio"/>
You're comfortable running approximately 30 miles per week	<input type="radio"/>

Everyone's pace is different, and for the first few weeks the distance that you cover during training sessions isn't important. Instead, it's more about building up your speed and stamina so that by the time you come to the distance sessions, you're more than prepared to tackle them. The harder you push yourself in the earlier weeks, the easier you'll find the longer distances - but make sure you take your rest days as well to stretch properly and let your body recover.

If you miss a session for any reason, don't panic! There's no need to try and make up the missed session, just skip it and carry on with the plan as soon as you're able.



# Training

## Training notes

Both of the training plans are made up of sessions that require not only different distances and amounts of time, but also running paces. Here's what they all mean:

### Easy run

Your easy running pace will be a comfortable one that you can easily hold a conversation at and requires very little effort.

### Steady run

Your steady running pace will be one that you need to put a bit of effort into; you should still be able to hold a conversation in shorter sentences and you should be getting a little out of breath.

### Threshold run

This is maximum effort; your breathing will be heavy and you may only be able to speak one or two words at a time. Bear in mind that your threshold pace will vary depending on the amount of time you need to be running for so that you can sustain it; your pace will be much faster over a two-minute interval than a ten-minute one.

### Interval training

On the training plans, Wednesdays are set aside for interval training. The idea behind these sessions is to get your body used to running at increased speeds, which will both improve your endurance over longer distances and your speed over shorter ones. It's especially important to warm up before and after interval sessions so that you're not shocking your body into the increased heart rates and muscle loads that faster running requires, and cool down again afterwards. Ten minutes of easy running either side is perfect.

### Fartlek run (advanced only)

Fartleks are sessions that vary in speed without structure and are anywhere between easy and threshold pace at your own discretion. To get the most out of these sessions, add in as much variation as you can.

### Top tip:

Tick off each session after you complete it; it's a great, visual way of seeing how much you've achieved. You've got this!





# Training plan - Beginner

**Key:** ER = Easy Run      SR = Steady Run      TR = Threshold Run

	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
<b>MONDAY</b>	30 mins ER	40 mins SR	45 mins SR	60 mins SR
<b>TUESDAY</b>	Rest	Rest	Rest	Rest
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>	2 x 10 mins TR (1 min recovery)	8 x 3 mins TR (1 min recovery)	Hill reps	2 x 15 min TR (5 mins recovery)
<b>THURSDAY</b>	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train
<b>FRIDAY</b>	Rest	Rest	Rest	Rest
<b>SATURDAY</b>	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR
<b>SUNDAY</b>	60 mins	70 mins	80 mins	90 mins

	WEEK 5	WEEK 6	WEEK 7	WEEK 8
<b>MONDAY</b>	45 mins ER	50 mins SR	25 mins SR	40 mins SR
<b>TUESDAY</b>	Rest	Rest	Rest	Rest
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>	1 min TR, 30 secs ER 2 min TR, 1 min ER 3 min TR, 90 secs ER 4 min TR, 2 min ER Reverse back down	Hill reps	3 x 10 mins TR (3 mins recovery)	5 x 1km TR (2 mins recovery)
<b>THURSDAY</b>	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train
<b>FRIDAY</b>	Rest	Rest	Rest	Rest
<b>SATURDAY</b>	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR
<b>SUNDAY</b>	6 miles	9 miles	50 mins	10 miles

## Training plan - Beginner

	WEEK 9	WEEK 10	WEEK 11	WEEK 12
MONDAY	60 mins ER	60 mins SR	40 mins SR	40 mins SR
TUESDAY	Rest	Rest	Rest	Rest
WEDNESDAY	Hill reps	2 x 15 min TR (5 mins recovery)	8 x 3 min TR (1 min recovery)	Hill reps
THURSDAY	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train
FRIDAY	Rest	Rest	Rest	Rest
SATURDAY	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR
SUNDAY	8 miles	12 miles	8 miles	6 miles

	WEEK 13
MONDAY	40 mins ER
TUESDAY	Rest
WEDNESDAY	3 miles ER
THURSDAY	Rest
FRIDAY	Rest
SATURDAY	parkrun / 5k ER
SUNDAY	RACE DAY

### What counts as cross-training?

Cross-training is any exercise that complements running but doesn't involve identical muscle groups, for example swimming, brisk walking, yoga and stretching.

# Training plan - Advanced

**Key:** ER = Easy Run      SR = Steady Run      TR = Threshold Run      FR = Fartlek Run

	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
<b>MONDAY</b>	30 mins ER	40 mins SR	45 mins SR	60 mins SR
<b>TUESDAY</b>	Rest	Rest	Rest	Rest
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>	2 x 10 mins TR (1 min recovery)	8 x 3 mins TR (1 min recovery)	Hill reps	2 x 15 min TR (5 mins recovery)
<b>THURSDAY</b>	40 mins SR	10 mins ER 20 mins SR 10 mins ER	10 mins ER 10 mins TR 5 mins ER 10 mins SR 5 mins ER	40 mins FR
<b>FRIDAY</b>	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train
<b>SATURDAY</b>	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR
<b>SUNDAY</b>	60 mins	70 mins	80 mins	90 mins

	WEEK 5	WEEK 6	WEEK 7	WEEK 8
<b>MONDAY</b>	45 mins ER	50 mins SR	25 mins SR	40 mins SR
<b>TUESDAY</b>	Rest	Rest	Rest	Rest
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>	1 min TR, 30 secs ER 2 min TR, 1 min ER 3 min TR, 90 secs ER 4 min TR, 2 min ER Reverse back down	Hill reps	3 x 10 mins TR (3 mins recovery)	5 x 1km TR (2 mins recovery)
<b>THURSDAY</b>	60 mins SR	10 mins ER 25 mins TR 10 mins ER	10 mins ER 15 mins SR 10 mins ER	10 mins ER 2 x 15 mins TR, 2 mins ER 10 mins ER
<b>FRIDAY</b>	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train
<b>SATURDAY</b>	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR
<b>SUNDAY</b>	6 miles	9 miles	50 mins	10 miles

# Training plan - Advanced

	WEEK 9	WEEK 10	WEEK 11	WEEK 12
MONDAY	60 mins ER	60 mins SR	40 mins SR	40 mins SR
TUESDAY	Rest	Rest	Rest	Rest
WEDNESDAY	Hill reps	2 x 15 min TR (5 mins recovery)	8 x 3 min TR (1 min recovery)	Hill reps
THURSDAY	10 mins ER 15 mins SR 10 mins ER	10 mins ER 2 x (2 mins TR, 1 min ER 3 mins TR, 90 secs ER 4 mins TR, 2 mins ER 5 mins TR, 2.5 mins ER) 10 mins ER	10 mins ER 5 x 30 secs TR 5 mins ER	5 mins ER 10 mins SR 10 mins TR 10 mins SR 10 mins ER
FRIDAY	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train	Rest / cross-train
SATURDAY	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR	parkrun / 5k TR
SUNDAY	8 miles	12 miles	8 miles	6 miles

	WEEK 13
MONDAY	40 mins ER
TUESDAY	Rest
WEDNESDAY	3 miles ER
THURSDAY	Rest / cross-train
FRIDAY	Rest
SATURDAY	parkrun / 5k ER
SUNDAY	RACE DAY

## What on earth is a fartlek?

Swedish for 'speed play', fartleks are unstructured effort sessions, designed to keep your heart rate inconsistent in order to build stamina and cardiovascular strength.

# Race week

Taking part in official races can be daunting, not just because of the distance that you'll need to cover but also because there's lots to think about logistically. However, the vast majority of races follow the same format; here are some tips to help you know what to expect.

## Preparing

Make sure you've read all of the pre-race instructions from the race organisers, which will tell you details like where you need to be and at what time, how to get to the start, where to park and details of local public transport.

The night before the race, spend a bit of time laying out your running kit, pinning your race number to your top and packing your post-race bag with a change of warm clothes so that everything is ready to hand in the morning. Some race organisers provide you with a specific bag for the bag drop, whereas others send you a tag to attach to your own bag; if you're provided with a bag, you must use this rather than your own. You might also want to bring an old item of warm clothing, or a bin liner, that you can throw away just before you cross the start line to keep you warm.

Use the information in your pre-race instructions to agree on a meeting point after the race for any supporters that are coming along with you.

### Top tip:

Include a tasty treat in your post-race bag so you know you've got it to look forward to. A personal favourite of Meningitis Now's resident runner Rachel is a bag of salt and vinegar crisps!

## Arriving

Give yourself plenty of time to get to the start; traffic can be heavy and queues for the toilets and bag drop can be long, with thousands of other runners all trying to get to the same place at the same time. If you're leaving a bag at the bag drop, make sure that your number tag is clearly visible and that you have everything you need; once you drop it off, you won't be able to access it until after the race.

Most races have an announcement system to keep everyone updated as the start time approaches, so listen or look out for this.

## Lining up

You will likely have been given a starting wave, which will be reflected on your bib by a colour and / or letter. Follow the signage around the race village to your starting pen and listen to any instructions from race marshals and officials. Use your time in the starting pen to warm up, chat to fellow runners, soak up the atmosphere and mentally prepare yourself.



## Race week

### The start

You're off! Unless you're right at the front, it might take a little time for you to cross the start line, but if you're aiming for a time, don't worry - your timing chip on the back of your race number will only activate once you cross the timing mats.

Try not to get swept up in the initial dash - you don't want to burn out. Even if you feel like everyone is overtaking you, try to stick to your own pace.

### Main race

There will be mile and / or kilometre markers all the way around the course so that you know how far you've gone, plenty of hydration stations and a great range of support, from casual spectators to official cheering points and quite often, live music.

For large events, water is often given out in bottles. Take little sips and drink to how you feel; if your stomach is starting to feel full of water it's definitely time to cut back. If it's hot, try pouring water over the inside of your wrists and offer any that you don't use to your fellow runners.

### The finish

The finish line will be clearly marked with a gantry, banner or archway and a timing clock. The timing chip on the back of your bib will give you your individual race time after the event. Keep moving forwards so that others can cross the line and you don't cramp up.

### Post-race

Collect your race goodies - t-shirt, medal, water and goody bag - before picking up your bag from the collection area. Have a good stretch and celebrate your fantastic achievement!

#### Top tip:

Running with a Meningitis Now charity place? Keep an eye out for details of our post-race reception in the run-up to the event - we'd love to see you there!

