

# **SEVEN STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL MARATHON**

**A Marathon Training Guide  
For Spiritual Inspiration and Physical Fitness**

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*“The spiritual life is a marathon,  
An inner marathon which never ends.  
The Supreme is begging  
All His seeker-children  
To be excellent runners-  
To run speedily, like deer-  
In this eternal inner journey.”  
Sri Chinmoy*

## **INSPIRATION**

Running poems such as this one can provide the **inspiration** needed to plan a training program and head out the door when the plan calls for action. To maintain the training over a period of time, which is essential when training for a long race such as the marathon, we need the inspiration on a continual basis. All poems I have included here are by **Sri Chinmoy** and are meant to inspire and motivate us each step of our journey in training for and participating in the marathon. With proper planning and training, we will definitely be able to cover the marathon distance of 26.2 miles (42K) easily and cheerfully. But without inspiration we may not always feel like getting our complacent body to follow our good advice or planning. In such a case, Sri Chinmoy has more **good advice**:

**Question:** Sometimes for days on end I don't feel like running, even though I know it is good for me. How can I overcome this reluctance?

**Sri Chinmoy:** “We have to practice self-discipline. It is by doing something, by becoming something, not necessarily something great or famous, that we can overcome our reluctance. It is through moving, which is progress, and achieving, which is another type of progress, that we can overcome reluctance. In order to overcome reluctance, **we have to have a goal** and we have to try to reach that goal. By always moving and progressing toward a goal, you not only become a better runner but you also become a better instrument of God.”

With this simple but powerful advice we can become motivated to begin our journey toward a goal. For absolute beginners, the goal may be just to run or walk up to a mile a day, or walk two minutes and jog two minutes for 10

minutes per day. For those with a background in regular running, the goal may be to increase the weekly mileage to be able to run a full marathon. Others may be aiming for a faster time in the marathon distance. Whatever the goal may be, we must first get the proper inspiration, motivating us to get out the door and start moving toward our goal.

## **GOALS**

The **first thing to consider** in training for a marathon is just what your **goal** is in the marathon. Do you just want to finish at any pace or do you have a specific time in mind? Do you just want to cover the miles either walking or jogging, or are you aiming at a personal best time?

The starting point of your training program depends on how much running have you done in the past year, how regularly you have been running recently, your overall physical condition at the moment, if you practice other physical fitness or aerobic activities on a regular basis, and to what extent you wish to race the marathon instead of just jogging it.

The training program itself depends on the goals you have set for yourself, if they are of course, realistic ones. Your goals should be both **long term and short term**. The long term goal is basically the marathon distance itself in this case. The short term goals are structured here on a weekly basis. Your weekly or short term goals depend on which category of running you belong to, which will be discussed below. From an inner or spiritual point of view, we should know the goals we have set for ourselves on a daily basis. It is of course helpful to be reminded from time to time. Poems such as these can help tremendously:

*“His matchless goal  
Is to set  
A new aspiration-record  
Every day.”*

*“Your days of orphan-sorrows  
Are behind you  
And  
Not beside you.  
Why, then, do you  
Helplessly cry?  
Your days of excellence-joys  
Are ahead of you  
And  
Not beside you.  
Why, then, do you not*

***Immediately run and declare:  
THE GOAL IS WON.”***

With that inspiration to reach our goal, we should immediately start, here and now, to run towards our goal.

## **PLAN**

When getting started, it is best to plan both **long term and short term goals** on paper. I suggest a **weekly calendar book** with space for each day to record your goals and your workouts, either generally or in detail. The top of each page should have the mileage or time goals you plan to reach for that week with perhaps one or two descriptions about the kinds of runs you plan to do. You can get this information as you read further about the schedule. You can also jot down any **cross training** activities you would like to do that week, such as weight training, biking or swimming. Having these notes written in your schedule book will remind you and motivate each day to reach these smaller weekly goals on the way to the larger or long range goal.

## **Stress and Tiredness**

The body gradually has to adapt to more and more stress in order to get naturally stronger. This happens to each person at their own unique and individual rate, so it is up to you to gauge your own progress and avoid injury. As you are training, try to always be aware of your level of energy and your physical condition. Consulting another experienced marathoner or **coach** would help if you are not sure of your recovery rate and level of stress.

***“Who is my coach?***

***He who inspires me***

***Before I run.***

***Who is my coach?***

***He who aspires in the through me***

***During my run.***

***Who is my coach?***

***He who corrects and perfects me***

***For a better future run.”***

While following this or any other training program, if you feel that by increasing your mileage you are hurting or are exhausted, then take an easy week or a few days off. You should always be aware of your own energy

levels and your own body's ability to adapt to stress and recover properly. The following question may thus be appropriate:

**'Should we run even when we are extremely tired?'**

**Sri Chinmoy :** "As a rule, when we are extremely tired it is not advisable to run, for it will not help us in any way. At that time, running will be nothing but fatigue and self-destruction, and it will leave in our mind a bitter taste. But sometimes, even when we are not extremely tired, we feel that we are. At that time we are not actually physically tired. We are only mentally tired or emotionally tired, but the mind convinces us that we are physically tired. Our human lethargy is so clever! It acts like a rogue, a perfect rogue, and we get tremendous joy by offering compassion to our body. We make all kinds of justifications for the body's lethargy and make ourselves feel that the body deserves rest.

So we have to be sincere to ourselves. If we really feel extremely tired, then we should not run. But we have to make sure that it is not our lethargic vital or our lethargic physical consciousness that is making us feel that we are extremely tired. This kind of tricky cleverness we have to conquer.

With our imagination-power we can challenge the tricky mind and win. We weaken ourselves by imagining that we are weak. Again, we can strengthen ourselves by imagining that we are strong. Our imagination often compels us to think we cannot do something or cannot say something. We often use imagination in a wrong direction. So instead of letting imagination take us backwards, we should use it to take us forward toward our goal."

In your **weekly plan book**, besides having recorded just what the weekly or short term plans are at the top of each page, it is important to record **what you actually did** each day in your training. You can include the time you spent training or how far you ran or walked, the type of training you did, how you felt, and anything else which you think will help to remind you of your experience or inspire you in the future. It is an effective method of self-motivation as well as a tool to analyze your training and any problems you may encounter in the future.

Another important feature of recording each workout is that it can help you determine the speed at which you will be able to run the marathon. If you

know the speed at which you are training and racing shorter distances, you will be able to **determine realistic goals** for your marathon time. This is important so that you can plan the long term goals with confidence and enthusiasm. **For example**, if you have run a half-marathon in 1 hour 20 minutes, you should be confident that with regular distance training you have the capacity to run under 3 hours for the marathon. If you cannot run the half-marathon in 1 hour 30 minutes, or at a sub-3 hour marathon pace, then you cannot expect to run a marathon at a sub-3 hour marathon yet.

## **START**

To determine where to start our training program, we should consider **four categories** of marathoning. You can decide which one you belong to at the moment, and begin or continue your training from there. The four categories are: **Walking, slogging** (slow jogging or walk-running), **running and fast racing**.

If you are in the **walking or slow jogging** category, you should start to, if you have not already, run or walk **five days a week for 20 to 40 minutes each day**. This is assuming that your heart is strong and you know you are fit enough to begin a regular training program. If you have a trusted doctor or physiotherapist, make sure they feel that you are fit enough to start a training program.

This **basic training period** is the time when we are building an **endurance base** and should last for at least two to three months with a **slight** increase in time or mileage each week if you feel strong enough to do so. If you increase your mileage each week, the increase should be only 5% to 10% more than the previous week's mileage. It is more important to have the regularity from week to week than to worry about increasing the weekly mileage too much, which could lead to injury or exhaustion. See the section on '**schedule**' to get more information.

To gauge the **intensity of the workout**, you could take your **pulse rate** occasionally. This should be about 70 to 75% of your maximum heart rate during a basic run or walk not involving anaerobic activity such as speedwork. Depending on your age and fitness level, 70% should be around 120 to 140 beats per minute. Your maximum heart rate is approximately **220 minus your age**. So if you are 50 years old, your maximum heart rate will be around 170 (beats per minute), or a bit more if you are really fit. 70 to 75% of that is about 120-130 beats per minute which is normal for aerobic training, or jogging at a pace below the anaerobic threshold, as opposed to anaerobic training, such as sprinting or speedwork.

To determine your **heart rate** during a session of jogging or walking, stop for ten seconds and count the pulse either on the wrist or the neck for only a ten second interval by your watch. If you multiply that by six, you will get your beats per minute(b.p.m.). For example, if you count 20 beats in 10 seconds, then your heart rate is 120 b.p.m.

*“Just start your inner race  
Without waiting to see  
Who else is ready to run with you.  
When others see you have reached your goal,  
They will also be inspired to run.”*

## **FITNESS**

After now having an idea as to what **our goals** are and how to get **inspiration** and stay **energized**, it would be helpful to know just what **qualities of fitness** we need to develop in our training in order to face such a great challenge of running, jogging, or walking a marathon.

*“When your soul’s qualities  
Come forward and start manifesting,  
Then not only your world  
Of outer running  
But also your world  
Of inner running  
Will acquire a very special significance.”*

Indeed, the **soul’s qualities** are by far the most important and most powerful qualities we need to manifest in order to run and enjoy a marathon. You know what spiritual disciplines you need to practice to bring those forward. At the same time, running and training towards a goal can in itself be a spiritual discipline.

The outer running can remind us of the inner running and be of spiritual value to it.

**Sri Chinmoy** says, *“The seeker-runner has a shadowless dream of his full realisation-day in his outer running. The seeker-runner has a sleepless vision of his God’s full Manifestation-Hour in his inner running.”*

The **qualities of fitness** that we are trying to develop in our training at different stages are also necessary to cover a full marathon distance. **Endurance, strength, stamina and speed** are essential qualities we must



develop. **Endurance** comes from the sustained mileage we run week after week as well as the longer runs we do on a weekly basis. **Strength** also comes from our regular training, hill workouts and any weight training we can fit in anytime in our program, preferably on the easier days or day off. **Stamina** is similar to endurance except with an increase in intensity or speed. **Speed**, of course, is how much distance you cover in a certain amount of time.

One other all important element in your training is **recovery**. Without proper recovery, you will be risking injury which will be counterproductive to the whole training process. Recovery includes rest, stretching, proper nutrition, and as an extra assurance, an occasional massage. All of these five fitness qualities will be developed in the following program to some extent, depending on which ones you wish to personally focus on the most.

## **SCHEDULE**

So now let's get a concrete schedule together so you can start manifesting all these inspiring concepts and qualities and begin your journey towards the eventual goal of racing, running, jogging, or walking a 26.2 mile (42 kilometer) marathon.

Do not forget to have a **schedule book** ready to enter the weekly plans and to record your actual daily workouts.

### **First three months (for beginners and those getting back into shape)**

The first advice to consider is the advice Sri Chinmoy gave in Hawaii in December 2001 when referring to training for the September Self - Transcendence Marathon. I felt that this meant mostly for those who want to complete the marathon even though they may not have much marathon experience, or are trying to get back into marathon shape.

My interpretation of what he said was that you can run **3-5 miles a day** on most days and then do a **longer run** one day a week, about 8 to 10 miles, or more if you are able. Continue this regularly from week to week for as many months as you can leading up to the marathon, then you should be able to run or run/walk the marathon.

I will add that you should give yourself at **least four to six months** to get into shape. This means you can either start with a little easier schedule if you are totally out of shape right now, and then you can work up to that mileage suggested and even go beyond it if you find it easy after four months or so. You could do a longer run or walk/run of 12- 15 miles if the 8-10 miler has gotten too easy after a few months.

It is this **gradual progress** and **regular, steady training** that will make the marathon distance easier and more enjoyable to accomplish when the time comes. Whether you increase the weekly mileage or not, I would like to repeat that regularity is most important even if you do not increase the mileage too much from week to week. Getting out to run just about every day is key to making the fastest progress.

This **basic training concept** is simple and should not be too difficult to follow unless you encounter physical or health problems. If it is too difficult to progress to 50 or 60 or more miles a week if you are aiming at only finishing the marathon and not intending to race or win the marathon, then just maintain 30 to 40 miles per week for until you feel ready for more.

The schedule below can be entered into your calendar book on a weekly basis and followed as much as possible until you feel you have worked up to the maximum mileage you are able to do without breaking down. Try to maintain around that mileage if you do not wish to increase it anymore. You must feel challenged to make some progress but you should not force yourself and over train and risk injury or illness. You can save that experience for the marathon itself (only kidding).

If you have trained for and run marathons in the past and want to try to run a personal best, then you should know what kind of shape you have to be in to do that. If you are trying to get to that level or are at that level and ready to train for a faster marathon now, then skip this first schedule below and go down to the second sample schedule below.

### **First Sample Schedule (for beginners and those getting back into shape)**

**WEEK**

#

1. Jog/ walk 2 miles per day, 5 days. Walk breaks only if not used to running that far.
2. Jog/ walk 2 miles per day, 4 days, one day 3 or 4 miles.
3. Jog 2 miles per day, 4 days, one day 4 miles.
4. Jog 2-3 miles per day, 5 days.
5. Jog 2-3 miles per day, 4 days, 4 miles one day.
6. Jog 3 miles per day, 5 days.
7. Jog 3 miles per day, 4 days, 4-5 miles one day.
8. Jog 3-4 miles per day, 4 days, 5 miles one day.
9. Jog 3-4 miles per day, 4 days, 5-7 miles one day.
10. Jog 4 miles per day, 4 days, 5-7 miles one day.

11. Jog 4 miles per day, 4 days, 7-8 miles one day.
12. Jog 4 miles per day, 4 days, 8 miles one day

These **first three months** give you an idea of how to structure your training in such a way that you build up your endurance and stamina without getting injured. You can continue in this fashion depending on how many more months you have before the actual goal race. If this mileage seems too easy for your fitness level, you can adapt it to your own level by increasing the mileage slightly. Be sure always to gauge your own recovery level though. If you are too tired or stressed out to continue your weekly mileage month after month, then you should decrease it for a week or so. If you have to take number of days or even a week off due to health problems, no harm, just get back on the schedule as soon as you feel stronger.

**As you approach the marathon**, in the last six weeks prior to it, you should have built up to approximately **30 to 40 miles per week** for at least a few weeks. This includes a longer run once a week or every ten days or so. That long run should be about 10 to 12 miles or so. It could include some walking breaks, especially if you plan to use walking breaks in your marathon. During this time it is also essential to be aware of your **recovery process** from day to day and week to week. You should feel as if you are progressively getting stronger, even though some days you may feel a bit tired, sore or weak.

Overall, you should feel a natural ability to **gradually increase** your mileage without forcing it. Only you can really know how you feel and how you are progressing. Use all the means available to you to speed up recovery. These include: stretching, hot baths, icing if necessary, massage, rest, proper nutrition and drinking **lots of water** regularly. Drinking at least a half gallon of water (2 litres), per day, is quite essential in recovery and avoiding dehydration even when resting. For more ideas on nutritional balance and concepts, as well as strength related cross-training, you can visit Mahasamrat's website, *[billpearl.com](http://billpearl.com)*.

### **Second Sample Schedule (for those who are trying to run for a faster time)**

For those who have more experience and capacity, you can work your weekly mileage up to 50 miles or more if you can fit it into your life both

time-wise and physically. Your long runs should be from 16 to 20 miles or more if you so desire. But make sure you **recover fully** from a long run before intensifying your workouts or mileage again. At this level, recovery is even more important to avoid injuries and consequently stall your training program.

**First Six Weeks** (Daily mileage depends on how much basic training you have had)

**Sunday**- Long, easy run (mileage depends on where you are in your training so far) **Monday**-Short, easy run or day off (Can replace running with cross-training)

**Tuesday**- Speedwork (depends on which you prefer, fartlek, interval, tempo)\* **Wednesday**-short, easy run

**Thursday**- Hill repeats (always warm up a few miles and go downhill easy)

**Friday**- Short, easy run

**Saturday**- Short, easy run, or cross-training

Remember this is just a sample, a guideline for you to create your own program. The **number of miles** is arbitrary for your own level of fitness. If you have already gotten through the basic type of training as in the first sample schedule, then you can make your weekly mileage in this **first six weeks somewhere between 30 to 40 miles per week**.

**Next Six Weeks**

**Sunday**- Long, easy run, increasing the distance from previous week by a mile or two

**Monday**- Short, easy run, or day off, or cross-training

**Tuesday**- Warm-up, then tempo run, or long intervals such as mile repeats\*

**Wednesday**- Medium, long easy run

**Thursday**- Warm up then shorter repeats such as 10 by 400 or 60 second fartleks\*

**Friday**- Short, easy run

**Saturday**- Easy run or short race

So now we have covered at least twelve weeks or **three months of training**. By this time your weekly mileage should be around **40 to 50 miles**, or more if you are accustomed to and adapted to that mileage already. If you have more time, depending on how many weeks are left before the marathon and you are not exhausted or hurting from the training so far, you can gradually try to up the mileage a bit for the next few weeks. You could do this by

increasing the length of your longer run, adding a mile here and there during the week or running twice in a day when you feel strong enough occasionally. Again, you should only do this if you feel you need the added challenge and feel strong enough to do so. Otherwise, just keep the same schedule and make sure you are recovering enough from week to week. If you feel you are not recovering enough, you should actually cut back the mileage and intensity a bit for about a week.

### **\*Speedwork**

**Speedwork** comes in many forms and preferences. The three main types of speedwork mentioned here are **intervals, fartlek(speedplay), and tempo runs.**

**Intervals** are relatively short, fast runs usually between 100 meters to 3000 meters with a short interval of recovery in between. Customarily done on a track, they can also be done on a measured course, preferably softer surfaces. They are run at an anaerobic pace, which is about 85-90% maximum heart rate. In other words, you should be huffing and puffing after each speed interval. Then do a recovery or slow pace for a short interval of time which could be from 200 to 400 meters or so. There are many ways to practice this type of speedwork, but repeating the interval of speed with intervals of recovery is the basic concept to develop top racing speed at any distance.

**Tempo runs** are slightly longer runs done at a strong, steady pace, usually about 20 seconds slower than a 10k race pace. They help to gain the speed as well as endurance for longer races.

**Fartlek** (a Swedish word for 'speedplay') is a less formal type of interval workout. Preferably done on softer surfaces such as grass, a golf course or trails, you speed up to an anaerobic pace ( a fast pace about equal to your short racing speed or 85- 90% maximum heart rate) for an arbitrary distance or time, then recover for about the same time and repeat this as many times as you feel fit to at that particular point in your training.

I would suggest doing 30 seconds hard, 30 seconds easy, and repeat that five to ten times, or even more as your training advances. You can eventually increase the time to a minute hard and minute easy, or even decrease the recovery or easy time. You can play around with it and be creative, thus the word 'speedplay'.

You can further discuss these and other types of speedwork with any experienced runner. Regardless of which one you practice, the most important thing is not to overdo it in training. Have enough strength left for your racing, trying to stay injury free to keep up your regular weekly

mileage. **Warm-up, warm down and some stretching** are also more important, especially on speedwork days.

For those who are interested in developing their speed to run a faster marathon, it is important to consider that this experience should add a very positive element to your training and racing, making it fun and making you happy, being careful to prevent injury in the process. Also, short to middle distance **races** run occasionally during this training phase are one of the best ways to speed up your marathon times. Running races from **two miles to half-marathons** are excellent for increasing your marathon speed. Always be sure to recover well between races though.

*“If you regularly do  
Your inner speed-work,  
Then your outer life  
Will be most powerfully fruitful.”*

*“With happy speed  
I run and run  
To cheerfully feed  
My human race,  
To transform  
My human face,  
To begin  
A new journey’s course,  
To free the sunlit source.”*

### **Tapering**

No matter which schedule you have followed so far, in the final two weeks or so before the goal marathon race, you should **start tapering**. That means gradually cutting back both the mileage and the intensity of the workouts. Your last long run should be no closer than two weeks before the marathon.

In the **final week before the marathon**, especially a few days before it, your daily mileage should be almost nothing, say two to five miles. You may even want to take a day or two off for better recovery. This is all assuming that your training has gone well and you are in better shape than when you first started. If your health has been good and you did not over train or have any major injuries or problems, then you should feel quite comfortable taking it easy for at least a week before. Even if your training did not go as

you may have planned, there is nothing you can accomplish except the risk of injury and exhaustion by cramming in miles in the final weeks.

## **RACE**

Needless to say, there are many strategies involved in running, jogging or walking a marathon. No matter how you plan to cover the distance of 26.2 miles, if you were able to follow at least some of the advice offered here, you will be ready both outwardly and inwardly. The **confidence and faith** in yourself should be strong enough to get to the starting line, to begin and to continue your journey.

*“Faith in oneself  
And faith in God  
Must run together.”*

*“I do not know  
How to run alone.  
Therefore my friend, faith,  
Accompanies me.”*

During the marathon the most important things to be aware of are: your **consciousness**, being **cheerful** and offering **gratitude** each mile, keeping your physical **energy** high enough by drinking **water** regularly and drinking other nutritional replacement drinks that keep your glycogen, or blood sugar level up. Even small amounts of fluids, a few swallows every so often, will help tremendously in maintaining your energy levels and muscle efficiency. Other ways to do this include taking small bites from an energy bar or some other solid food if you like. Try doing this during your longer training runs to get used to it first. Normally it is not a good idea to eat anything during the race that you have not tried in training.

Another important thing to remember while running is to **stay focused** on something positive or spiritual. Keeping a **rhythm** going in your breathing by chanting or repeating a short aphorism, spiritual word or song can help greatly in getting you through each mile, especially if the going gets tough.

*“I am running a marathon,  
Self-pity, self-doubt, all gone.”*

*The golden Goal is beckoning me.  
I am now ecstasy-flood-sea.”*

No matter how you look at it, the marathon is a great challenge, taking much effort and involving quite a bit of energy and perhaps a bit of pain or discomfort along the way. In any case, it should be a wonderful **experience of transcendence**, no matter how many times you may have covered the distance before. Regardless of the time it takes you to reach the finish line, because of your preparation and sincere efforts, you should feel like a winner.

*“Who is the winner? Not he who wins but he who has established his cheerful oneness with the result, which is an experience in the form of failure or success, a journey forward or a journey backward.*

*Who is the winner? Not he who wins the race but he who loves to run sleeplessly and breathlessly with God the Supreme Runner.”*

*“There are only three winners:  
The one who competes with himself,  
The one who crosses the finish line first  
And the one who finishes the race.”*

Finally, with a **cheerful** attitude and a hero-warrior **determination**, anyone can cover the distance of the 26.2 mile marathon. The result will not matter, whether you consider it victory or failure, because in either case you will have made tremendous progress.

*“To make the fastest progress,  
Be an absolutely cheerful  
Hero-warrior  
And take both victory and failure  
As parallel experience-rivers  
Leading to the sea  
Of progress-delight.”*

It is my hope that this guideline will be of some value in getting you across that finish line, cheerfully and safely, and to have fun. Here’s a little more inspiration from Sri Chinmoy to carry you along:

*“O Lord, may each marathon runner run along Your Eternity’s Road to*



*receive from You Your Infinity's Love-Light and Your Immortality's  
Oneness-Delight."*

*"O my poor body,  
Your marathon run  
Was not a bad mistake.  
But your lack of marathon fun  
Is, indeed, a sad mistake."*

*"Courageously surmount each obstacle  
On your spiritual journey  
And continue to walk, march and run  
Along the sunlit path."*

*"Carry on the struggle.  
You will eventually win.  
Strive with vigour.  
You will certainly win.  
Depend entirely on God's Grace.  
You will immediately win."*

*"Run,  
You can easily shake hands  
With fleeting time.  
Run,  
You can easily challenge  
The pride of frightening distance."*

*"Marathon, marathon, marathon,  
Eternity's dawn.  
O kindling, streaming flames  
Of great Olympic Games,  
O Greece-world vision-height,  
Cosmos-oneness-delight!"*

*Humanity's transcendence-race,  
Divinity's supreme Grace."*

*"Twenty-six miles I am running,  
Smiling, dancing, no crying.  
I am a marathon runner:  
Body's ignorance-hunter."*

*"O marathon runner,  
God the Smiler-Winner!  
Bondage-body's supreme victory  
Challenged life's summit-glory.  
You claim today for every day  
In the Captain's cosmic Oneness-Play."*

(All poems and quotes are by **Sri Chinmoy**. For more inspirational poetry and spiritual advice about running, please read:

***The Outer Running and the Inner Running*** by Sri Chinmoy <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/outer-running-and-the-inner-running>)