

Form, Strength, Balance: Keys to Faster Race Times

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Profiles in Running

Marathon Trailblazing: Tips For Baby Boomers

By JOE SINCLAIR

For many years, I believed that people born in the early years of the baby-boomer generation (that usually includes the years 1946 to 1964) represented a youthful generation. Recently, reality has set in and I found myself in a group that still attempts youthful activities in an aging body. In the 12-month period from August, 2009, through July, 2010, I was fortunate enough to complete 22 full marathons, including two ultra marathons. During this time, my friends accused me of being insane, frequently assuming that my brain cells had diminished to the point that I would "foolishly" try to run these events. Joining the Marathon Maniacs group actually helped to make believers out of my friends!

Recently, other runners have been asking me many questions about preparing for these events and how my body adjusted to the challenges of miles of road pounding. It helps that I am a slow runner, more interested in finishing the races than in winning them. Being a slow runner helps my body survive from one marathon to the next event. One thing is for sure... whether a large or small event, all marathons are at least 26.2 miles in length... there are no shortcuts! Before considering distance running, a yearly physical examination is extremely important for anyone who decides to run. Besides preparing to run, there

are a number of good reasons for having regular check-ups.

Over time, I have developed certain routines and strategies that help me prepare for each marathon. The information I am going to share is strictly from my own personal experiences and may, in some instances, provide helpful tips for others who are considering getting into serious running. Every runner must develop his or her own style and technique.

Mental preparation is extremely important for successful distance running. Thinking positively about upcoming events and, if possible, having a running partner to help you pace the first few miles can produce very good results. Silvana Temblador, Gladys Lippard, and Brent Roach are veteran marathoners who frequently participate in distance running with me. My rule of the road is planted inside my head: "Age is a number, not an excuse!" You should know your limitations and adjust your running strategy accordingly. I am not necessarily competing against others; I am competing with myself, striving for positive results not failure.

Important parts of mental preparedness are attitude and community. It is very rewarding to talk with other runners about their experiences. You can listen for suggestions that they may have for successful marathons. I personally have learned something "new" at every event.

Physical preparation, of course, requires many months of proper training before attempting marathon events. Cross training needs to be included in any conditioning program.

events is both mentally and physically rewarding. From that point, the half marathon is the next attainable goal for most runners, followed later by the full marathon. Running a total of 45 to 55 miles each week helps to maintain leg strength and keeps me mentally and physically prepared for the next event.

Routines or strategies that I personally use to prepare for each marathon include:

*Thoroughly study the marathon course and make mental notes about the number and location of aid stations, elevations, texture of terrain (rock, smooth, dirt/asphalt surface), etc.

*Get a good night of sleep before the event (at least seven hours each night). It is especially important to get adequate sleep two days before the event.

*Select foods carefully. For two days prior to the marathon, try to avoid spicy, leafy foods that may cause excess gas and other intestinal problems.

*Trim toenails with caution, if at all, right before a race. Try to avoid trimming nails within 24 hours of the marathon.

*Eat balanced meals the entire week before the event. My pre-marathon dinner usually consists of either pasta or salmon with potatoes, and no rich desserts. Plenty of liquids are important. I drink water and Gatorade constantly during this day.

On the actual day of the marathon, my routine is set. I usually eat an English muffin with peanut butter and jelly or honey, along with a banana and one cup of coffee. My goal is to eat two hours before the starting time to allow proper digestion to occur. I always check before each marathon to

have found chocolate milk and/or a chocolate milk shake to be very good sources to replenish my energy after the event.

Some other helpful advice when running long distance races includes:

Wear light clothing in warm weather
Use "Glide" on sensitive areas to avoid chafing discomfort

Use "lace locks" on running shoes to avoid shoe lace problems

Place light bandages over areas of the body prone to injury

Wear wrist bands large enough to hold jelly beans (for emergency energy), Aleve (for body aches), and Immodium tablets (for digestive emergencies)

Apply sun screen (SPF 70) to help avoid skin problems

Wear proper water-wicking clothing and socks

Apply Vaseline on toes and portions of the feet to avoid blisters

Purchase quality running shoes with memory foam inserts for extra cushioning

Wear a timing device to keep up with time in the race

Stretch before and after the event (very important)

Every runner has his or her own strategies. This article has described some of the strategies that I have developed over the years, sometimes through "trial and error." If any of these ideas benefit other runners, then it has been time spent in a productive manner. From a health and safety standpoint, always "do what your body will let you do." Extreme exertion can lead to very undesirable consequences. Best of luck from a "baby boomer trailblazer!"



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