

Marie Murphy Health & Fitness

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Post-Marathon Recovery and Nutritional Guidelines

When athletes complete a marathon distance usually their thoughts are not focused on the importance of recovery; making the right choices in post-training and nutrition. Crossing the finishing line participants are mainly excited and relieved that they have just finished.

Nutrition and exercise are thoughts many athletes focus on during their training and give little thought to these key elements once the goal has been accomplished. Yet the only way to reap the benefits from your efforts of running a marathon is to do the right things following the event.

Also, athletes who have not taken the proper steps seem to never want to run another marathon or worse yet never return to regular exercise. To avoid this happening to you here are some tips on how to gain strengths from your accomplishments and enjoy many more marathons in the future.

One major factor on post-marathon recovery is on how well you prepared yourself for your race. Doing the proper training is the first key to a speedy recovery. If you have not done the work beforehand you will feel the effects on your body no matter how much rest you take or how good you may think your nutrition is. Everyone wants to gain from their marathon experience so it is with the proper training, nutrition and a recovery routine that you will have your next training programme starting at a new level of fitness.

During the first three days following your marathon is a time for your body to take a complete rest. At this time you should continue to drink plenty of water as you had been before your marathon; this will help reduce any inflammation you may have and help your body continue to keep its regular metabolism. Stretching will help with any stiffness you may have in your muscles and also help with removing the build-up of waste products. Icing is another benefit to also keep in mind during those first three days following your marathon.

Nutrition should be light on your digestive system. The stress of a marathon on your body slows down your metabolism; which makes digesting heavy proteins an added stress to your body. Keeping to smaller portions but eating more frequently during those three days will help rebuild your glycogen stores and help increase your energy level. Remember you are rebuilding muscle fibres and tissues that were torn down during the efforts of your marathon so good nutrition is essential for proper repair to those aching muscles.

There should be minimum changes to your overall nutrition following your marathon as to how it was during your pre-marathon training. The only major difference should be in the portion sizes because of the reduced volume in your workouts and energy expenditure.

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Many athletes think they can eat what they want following a marathon. And yes, we have definitely burned up many calories while out there on the roads. However the choices in those calories are what really count's especially if we have plans on returning to an exercise routine stronger and faster than we were before our marathon. What you choose to eat in the days following your marathon will have direct consequences on the strengths that you gain and the speed of your recovery. Concentrating on eating lots of fruits and vegetables and reducing the high fats and heavy proteins will make the difference. Your body will thank you for it and your running will improve.

Each week you can add an extra 15 minutes to your aerobic workout. The rule of thumb I have mentioned before is to allow yourself a week for every hour it took you to complete your marathon; this will be the time needed in your active recovery routine. During this time you are only doing aerobic workouts based on your level of fitness and resuming the high intensity workouts only after completing the weeks needed in recovery. So let's say your marathon takes you 4 hours to complete. Following those first three days of complete rest your weekly routine should go as follows, week one longest run 30 minutes, week two longest run 45 minutes, week three longest run 1 hour and week four longest run 1:15minutes. After this time you may add interval workouts and hills to your overall training programme.

Starting back too soon with both high intensity workouts and long runs will not allow your body to fully recover from your marathon. Many athletes make this mistake coming off a personal best time in their marathon and begin training for their next marathon way too soon. However the excitement and their fitness keeps them going for a couple of months or so and then they find themselves struggling with their workouts both mentally and physically. This usually starts taking place just as the mileage increases again. At this point the damage has already been done and in most cases they get injured or drop out of the marathon they had been training for. The rest they avoided in the beginning became a forced rest down the road. As a coach I have witnessed this many times.

So, give yourself the required rest, replenish well and ease back into the quality and quantity of your training that will have the greatest benefits to improve your fitness level.

Coach Murphy