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In case you’re wondering if half marathon training is easy, it isn’t. In fact, it isn’t considered a training season until you’ve had some tough, humbling runs. But before you start asking yourself, “Why did I sign up for this?,” there are little things you can do along the way to improve the journey.

**Personalize it.** There are lots of ways to prepare for a half marathon, but the plan that will work best for you should line up with your goals, interests and life schedule. Your program may look a little different than your friend’s, but when it aligns with the things you enjoy, you’ll stick with it, have more fun and are more likely to succeed. Do you like Pilates? Blend it into your training plan twice a week to stay happy and balanced.  Make your own recipe to the half marathon start line, and you’ll look forward to the next workout and many more.

**Mix and match.**  Burn out and lack of motivation can arise from doing the same thing over and over again. Keep your program fresh by finding a new trail or running your normal route backwards. Toss in some of your favorite cross-training activities (cycling, stand-up paddle boarding, yoga, Zumba) a few times a week to work a variety of muscles, decrease the wear and tear on your body, and refresh your running spirit. A simple change of scenery can renew your motivation for the program.

**Invest in rest.** The difference between running for fitness and for a long-distance event is the former remains similar in terms of workouts week to week and the latter continues to progress in mileage and intensity.  Rest days and cutback weeks are woven into the program to give you time to recover from the demands of training and adapt and grow stronger. Rest is to training as sleep is to life. Invest in the down time and your body will reward you with stronger performances down the road.

**Listen, adjust, and keep moving forward.**It is important to think of your initial training plan as a blue print that you can revise if minor detours happen along the way. Listen to your body for aches and pains or just plain fatigue. If your body is giving you a yellow flag with a few aches, take an extra day off and adjust to allow full recovery. This will make the difference in the success of your performance in the long run. If you address the aches efficiently, they will subside with a little TLC.

**A little core strength and flexibility can improve your form.** A strong, flexible body is one that can endure over longer distances with less impact forces and use less energy.  That sounds like something on Superman’s resume, but it’s true. Investing a few 15-minute sessions on core strengthening exercises can improve your form and durability for race day. Long-distance running is a high impact, repetitive sport and because of this, muscles, joints and tendons can become tight from the wear patterns. This can also happen from our daily lifestyles (sitting at work, wearing high heels, driving). Muscle tightness combined with weakness or imbalance can play a role in injury develop and inefficient form.  Dedicate five to 10 minutes after every workout to stretching and foam rolling and it can release tightness, alleviate aches and pains, and keep you running strong.  **Be social**. Research has shown that when runners train with a social group or buddy they run longer and faster than when alone. If you find yourself lacking motivation to run those long miles, find a friend, join a group, and make it social. The miles fly by as you talk about the movie you saw, work, the kids or solving world peace.

**Train by effort rather than pace.** Unless you have a keen sense of your running fitness level (as elite runners do), training by a specific pace in minutes per mile can run you ragged. If all things are going well today—you slept well, you ate well, you match well and you feel well—a 10-minute pace run might easily be in your scheduled easy workout zone. But take this same run on a day where it is extremely hot and humid, you didn’t sleep well, you forgot breakfast and you have a cold… and this same easy run at a 10-minute pace could turn into a hard run and compromise the quality of the next workout.  Pace is the outcome, not the target. If you continue to train hard on your easy days because you are following what’s on paper rather than reality, it can lead to burn out and poor performance.

When you train by your effort level (how you feel, heart rate, perceived exertion), you flow with the rhythm of your life and make the most of each day. The green zone is an easy effort where you can't hear your breathing and it feels effortless. Run in this zone for planned easy and long, slow runs. The orange zone is an effort where you can hear your breathing, but it is just outside your comfort zone. This is the zone reserved for moderate level runs (tempos, race pace). Red zone sounds as hard as it is. It’s the effort where you are breathing hard and well outside your comfort reaching for air. Save this for speed workouts, intervals, short races and the last few miles of the half marathon. Keep it simple, run from within (how you feel) and you’re more likely to recover efficiently and run strong longer.