

# Training guide for runners

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## The sub-4:00 programme



This is the programme for you if you have previously run a marathon and finished in a time of anything between 4:00 and 4:30, and you now want to make a bigger time and energy investment into running faster.

If you've never run a marathon, but fancy going sub-4 in your first race, then you too can do this plan, but we'd recommend that you have a couple of half marathons under your belt, and that your half marathon time is between 1:50 and 2:00, with some room for improvement. Your 10km time would be in the range of 50 minutes for a realistic marathon target of 4 hours.

The programme involves either four or five days (your choice), and will consist of a weekly long run (on the weekends, your choice between Saturday and Sunday), with one other "harder" or quality session, which could be a hill session for strength, a harder time-trial or interval training session. There are also regeneration/maintenance days, and of course rest days, which are the most important days in the whole programme because they allow you to recover and adapt to the previous days' training.



## Sub 4:00 training guide for runners

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The long runs start at 1:40 in Week 1 the sub-4 programme, so we'd recommend that you are currently capable of running for at least this time, or at least that you can do a run of 1:30 even if you require some short walking breaks to complete it. As the program develops, those long runs get longer and longer, building up to get your body and mind ready for the challenge for four hours on race day in October!

The whole programme is available to you, but every few weeks, we'll bring out some helpful information that explains what the short-term goals are, as well as giving some useful advice on specific sessions that are coming up in the next few weeks. This will include advice on the paces you could aim to run certain sessions in, but overall, our objective is to run for time, not distance.

That's why the long runs are shown in time, rather than distance. For instance, it may say "Long run – 3 hours, no distance target". Given that your goal is a 4 hour marathon (5:40 per km), the pace for the 3 hour long run would be something between 5:35 and 5:50, which would mean your 3 hour run would be around 31km long. But you might end up running 29 to 30, because you mix walking and running, and the idea is not to run the marathon before you run the marathon anyway! Or maybe you reach 32km, which is also fine, provided you are holding back and running at the right intensity. The point is that you don't get hung up on those distances now, we'll explain it all as the programme develops and keep you informed about exactly what the goals are every few weeks.

We also use RPE to judge effort, rather than pace or even heart rate, though of course you can and should track anything that you think is meaningful to you. But RPE, or Rating of Perceived Exertion, is the one metric that combines all the important stuff into how you feel, and that's what we think is the best way to judge your training efforts. We'll explain this as we dive into the programme, too.





# Training guide for runners

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## The sub-4:30 programme



This is the programme for you if you have previously run a marathon and finished in a time of anything between 4:30 and 5:00, and you now want to make a bigger time and energy investment into running faster.

If you've never run a marathon, but fancy going sub-4:30 in your first race, then you too can do this programme, but we'd recommend that you have a couple of half marathons under your belt, and that your half marathon time is between 2:00 and 2:15, with some room for improvement. Your 10km time would be in the range of 55 to 60 minutes for a realistic marathon target of 4:30, and you'd need to be running at least 3 days a week to start with.

The programme involves either four or five days (your choice), and will consist of a weekly long run (on the weekends, your choice between Saturday and Sunday), with one other "harder" or quality session, which could be a hill session for strength, a harder time-trial or interval training session. There are also regeneration/maintenance days, and of course rest days, which are the most important days in the whole programme because they allow you to recover and adapt to the previous days' training.



## Sub 4:30 training guide for runners

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The long runs start at 1:20 in Week 1 the sub-4:30 programme, so we'd recommend that you are currently capable of running for at least this time, or at least that you can do a run of 1:15 even if you require some short walking breaks to complete it. As the program develops, those long runs get longer and longer, building up to get your body and mind ready for the challenge for four hours on race day in October!

The whole programme is available to you, but every few weeks, we'll bring out some helpful information that explains what the short-term goals are, as well as giving some useful advice on specific sessions that are coming up in the next few weeks. This will include advice on the paces you could aim to run certain sessions in, but overall, our objective is to run for time, not distance.

That's why the long runs are shown in time, rather than distance. For instance, it may say "Long run – 3 hours, no distance target". Given that your goal is a 4:30 marathon (6:20 per km), the pace for the 3 hour long run would be something between 6:15 and 6:30, which would mean your 3 hour run would be around 28 km long. But it might be that you run 29km, or maybe 27km, because you mix walking and running, which is fine. The key is that you don't get hung up on those distances now, we'll explain it all as the programme develops and keep you informed about exactly what the goals are every few weeks.

We also use RPE to judge effort, rather than pace or even heart rate, though of course you can and should track anything that you think is meaningful to you. But RPE, or Rating of Perceived Exertion, is the one metric that combines all the important stuff into how you feel, and that's what we think is the best way to judge your training efforts. We'll explain this as we dive into the programme, too.

Good luck, and we look forward to speaking more, and helping you towards a successful Cape Town Marathon in October! - **Dr Ross Tucker and the Virgin Active team**





# Training guide for runners

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## The Novice Training Plan

Running a marathon is all about managing the body. Managing the physiology that gets you from start to finish, and that includes the mind! This is as true for the athlete who lines up want to win, to smash a previous personal best, to break a barrier, or for the first-time marathon runner.

The whole point is not that you break through the fatigue barrier, but rather that you respect that barrier enough to never bash into it! And that's what this first-time marathon programme is all about – teaching you how best to manage your physiology, your body, and your mind, so that you get from start to finish in control of every step.

Think of it like a budget – you start the month with a paycheck, and you know that this paycheck has to last you 30 days, until the end of the month. At the start of the marathon, you have certain reserves, and you need to make these physical and mental reserves last until the 42.2 km mark.

You know there will be expenses – a hill, a tough stretch into the week, a period of doubt when you question whether you'll make it. But you can handle those “expenses” because you know they are coming, you've prepared for them, and so you will neither be surprised nor defeated by them.

And that's all this programme is – a 15 week exercise in teaching how to budget to spend your physical and mental reserves.

How will you conquer your first marathon? Step by step. Minute by minute. The whole principle of this plan is to teach you how to listen to your body, how to add a little bit more load onto your body every week, and then to get to that start line confident that you've built up the experience,



## The Novice Training Plan

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the resilience and the wisdom to get you successfully to the finish.

We do this, quite simply, by planning. Running a marathon is not about running or walking 42.2 km in one go. It's about running much shorter periods over and over, and then resetting your mind with short breaks as you need them. It's about breaking the whole thing into smaller chunks, and then “eating the whole” piece by piece.

That's why you'll see that this programme is set up to build you towards being capable of running for 15 minutes at a time, then walking for six minutes at a time, repeated over and over until that finish line is reached. It is the mix of walking and running that makes the task easier, because you never have to “survive”. You don't run until you have to walk, you plan to walk before you have to, so that you can run strong when you want to!

To begin with, you'll gradually introduce running. In the first two to three weeks, for example, you'll run for only two to four minutes at a time, with four to five minutes of walking in between. Sound doable? I think so, no matter your current fitness level.

Over time, as the weeks progress, we'll steadily increase your running time, so that by week 7 and 8, you're running for 8 minutes at a time, again with five to six minute walks. You'll be repeating these for a long time in your weekly long run, but that's ok, the goal is to get you used to time on your feet, moving forward, not necessarily at pace, but with consistent controlled effort.

Then, as we approach the race, you'll build that run up to 15 minutes, repeated over and over, but each time with a 6 min recovery period where you walk, relax, recover, and get ready to go again. If you can, by October, get your mind and



## The Novice Training Plan

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body ready to run for 15 min, walk for six minutes, then this marathon is all yours.

We'll also do a few other sessions a few – one is an easy maintenance day, up to an hour long, where you again mix walking and running, just learning what different paces feel like, gaining confidence in your body. And then the third is a more 'playful' session, where you run a little faster, but with longer recovery periods, and where you experience what speed feels like, making you a smoother, faster runner.

The full package will bring you to the start line full of confidence, and capability. You may well decide that you want to run more than the 15 minutes at a time that I am recommending, and that's great. It means you'll finish much faster than six hours. But if your goal is to get across that line feeling good, and in control, then this three-day programme is just what you need.

Finally, you'll notice that none of the sessions are allocated to specific days of the week. Instead, there are three sessions, named Day 1, Day 2 and Day 3. It's up to you where they go, with only two constraints. They are:

- Make sure that the day after your Day 3 session is a rest day (for example, if you do Day 3 on Sunday, make sure Monday is a rest day)
- Never do Day 2 on the day immediately before Day 3 (so don't for instance, do Day 2 on Friday and Day 3 on Saturday)

The rest is up to you! Have fun, pay attention to your body and enjoy the journey as you learn your limits, and then reset them!





# Get your Training Plan

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We've put together a series of training plans packed with marathon tips and cross training advice from our experts. If you have your heart set on finishing Sub-4:00 or Sub-4:30, or you are a novice runner with the goal of crossing the finish line strong, we have plans for you too.

To get started, answer a few easy questions and we'll email your personalised training plan to you.

**DOWNLOAD YOUR PLAN**





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- Gerda Steyn.

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**How our classes  
can improve  
your running  
performance**





# Training guide for runners: Cross Training

## CYCLE

Try a Spirit class to have fun while getting fit. Looking for something more serious? Train like a pro in a Burn class – it's all about sets, reps and intensity.

- + Cardio fitness and endurance
- + Fun
- + Better lactate threshold
- + Avoid repetitive strain injuries



## YOGA

More than just a stretch, this ancient practice is a great way for runners to de-stress and align the body. Choose from our Calm, Align and Flow Yoga classes.

- + Flexibility
- + Muscle strength and balance
- + Injury prevention
- + Refresh mindset

## CORE

Core strength is crucial for runners as it provides stability, improves running efficiency, and helps prevent injuries. Wrap up your next visit with one of our 15-minute Express Abs classes.





# Training guide for runners: Cross Training

## GRID

A unique combination of high-intensity interval training, functional fitness, and mobility.

- + Better muscle economy
- + Muscle strength
- + Joint stability
- + Minimised risk of injury

Pro tip: Avoid during intense running weeks and ensure enough recovery time.



## PILATES

Pilates is great for runners as it combines low-impact flexibility, muscular strength, and endurance movements.

- + Core strength
- + Stability
- + Postural alignment

## SWIMMING

The ultimate low-impact, full body workout.

- + Breath control
- + Heart health

Pro tip: If swimming isn't already part of your routine, opt for an Aqua Fitness class to get started.





# Have a nutrition action plan

Just as you plan and schedule your training sessions, it is important to plan how you eat during race prep.

- Decide what to eat and drink before, during, and after training and races.
- Test and refine your nutrition strategy during long runs.
- Be well-prepared by knowing what works best for you.





# Make sure you eat enough

- Get enough energy during training.
- Not getting enough energy can harm performance and training adaptation.
- Carbohydrates provide valuable and accessible energy for the body.
- Optimal diet: lots of carbs, moderate protein, less fat.
- Eat 1-2 handfuls of pasta, potato, rice, etc. or 2-4 slices of whole wheat bread with lean meat for meals.
- Choose high-quality foods like whole grains, fruits, veggies, plant fats, and lean proteins.
- Eat plant foods with different nutrients for better health benefits.
- Eat concentrated carbohydrates if food volume feels overwhelming (e.g. dried fruit, fruit juice, energy bars), but don't rely on these alternatives entirely.
- Eating smaller meals frequently helps ensure sufficient energy intake.
- Be cautious of excessive fibre, protein, or fat, as they can hinder energy consumption.





# Timing is important

- Prioritise optimal nutrition before, during, and after intense training or races.
  - Carbo-loading is highly beneficial for race-day energy, especially if you consumed limited carbohydrates during training.
  - To carbo-load, increase carbohydrate intake three days before the event while reducing exercise.
  - Consume larger servings of carbohydrate-rich foods or more concentrated sources.
  - In the final 24 hours before the race, decrease high-fibre and high-fat foods.
  - Opt for small portions of protein to create room for additional carbohydrates.
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- Eat a meal 1 hour before exercise to fuel and prevent stomach issues.
  - Aim for a comfortable feeling in the gut, neither too empty nor too full.
  - Choose low or high Glycaemic Index (GI) carbohydrates based on preference.
  - Start eating and drinking within the first hour of exercise. Consume food and fluids every hour during prolonged exercise.
  - Use sports drinks or solid foods like sandwiches, potatoes, or energy bars.
  - Replenish energy and fluid stores after exercise for better recovery.
  - Drink carbohydrate energy drinks immediately after finishing.
  - Have a high carbohydrate meal or snack within 30 minutes after exercise.
  - Eat high carbohydrate snacks every 2 hours for about 24 hours.
  - Include fluids and gradually add protein for muscle repair.





# Be practical



- Choose foods and fluids that are easy to eat, carry, and digest during your run.
- Opt for portable options like hydration packs for sufficient fluid intake.
- Unwrap bars or date balls before the race to ensure easy access.
- Select foods that are not too dry, easy to chew, and swallow, such as food purées.
- Avoid high protein and fat foods during intense exercise as they are harder to digest.
- Test nutrition strategies during training and preparation races, avoiding new approaches on race day.

## Need pro help?

If you're a serious competitor looking for specific dietary advice, visit the Association for Dietetics in South Africa to speak to a dietitian.



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