

Race-day preparation is key to your success on the big day. Here are 10 ways to gear up, get ready, and cross the finish line strong.

1. Enjoy The Taper

For many runners, the decreased running during the [taper](#) can be very unnerving. Avoid replacing the runs with lots of cross-training. The taper is designed to allow your body to recuperate, rebuild, and be fresh for race day. Adding in extra cross-training at the last minute can cause your fitness level to dip and actually lessen your race-day potential. Enjoy the taper and focus on getting yourself mentally prepared for the race. Spend some time visualizing the route and how the day is going to go!

2. Fuel Up

During the last three days before an endurance run such as a [marathon](#), a runner's carbohydrate intake should increase to 70 to 80 percent of his/her total daily caloric intake.

- **Day 1:** The first day of the carb-load should consist mainly of complex carbs (i.e., whole grain breads and pasta). By loading up on complex carbs the first day, you have time for them to be processed and voided well before race day.
- **Day 2:** Taper off the complex carbs and switch over to simple carbs. Be careful though. Don't load up on tons of fruit and the like, if you're not used to eating lots of fruit. Also avoid loading up on simple carbs that contain a lot of saturated fat (cookies, doughnuts, pastries). The extra fat will slow down digestion and make you feel sluggish. This is the time to eat regular pasta and use white bread for your sandwiches.
- **Day 3:** Continue with the simple carbs. Eat your last major meal 12 to 15 hours prior to the race. This meal should be comprised of easily digestible foods that will pass through your system before the race. This is the time for the big plate of regular pasta. Avoid heavy cream sauces and stick with basic marinara sauce.

FYI: Each gram of carbs can store 3 grams of water. So, to make sure you get complete carb storage, drink four to eight glasses of water each day. You may gain a pound or two during this carb-loading phase, but most of this extra weight is water and will actually help keep you well hydrated during the race. Plus, you'll sweat out those extra pounds on the run.

Practice: [Eating before a race](#) can be a tricky thing. Test different foods for your carb-loading phase well before race day. Pick one of your longest training runs and pretend it's "race day." Try a mini-carb-loading phase before this run. This will give you the opportunity to see how long different foods take to pass and which ones to avoid because they "hang around" too long.

Note: Diabetics and others with specific health problems should consult with their doctors about the best foods to eat during their carb-loading phase.



3. Hydrate

Hydration can make or break your race. Use the following tips to ensure you're properly hydrated at the starting line.

- **Find out what sports drink will be provided during the race.** If you're able, train using the same sports drink provided by the marathon. If your system doesn't tolerate the featured race drink or you'd just prefer to use something different, be sure to plan out how you'll carry or have access to your preferred hydration source. Some options include, wearing a hydration belt or stakeout family members or friends along the course ready to hand you your preferred fluids.
- **Never use the featured sports drink in a marathon if you did not use it in your training.** The different brands of sports drinks contain varying amounts of carbs and electrolytes. Some contain other components such as protein. If you've not tried these products during training, you don't want to risk causing stomach issues on race day.
- **Don't over-hydrate.** Throughout the day before the race, drink water when you are thirsty, but don't overdo it. Drinking 4-8 oz of water each hour works well. Remember, you'll still be carb-loading on this day. Make sure some of your carb intake includes salty simple carbs like pretzels. Also eat a banana or two for the potassium. This will help ensure that you're not flushing out your precious electrolytes that you'll need during the race. Do not drink alcohol the day before the race. This can dehydrate you.

- **Drink 16 oz. of water two hours before race time.** This will provide enough time for the water to pass through your system and the excess be voided well before the start.

4. Enjoy The Expo, But Resist The Urge

Race expos are lots of fun. They're usually full of vendors selling everything from shoes to gear to sport drinks. Feel free to take advantage of shoe and clothing bargains, but never, never, never wear anything purchased at an expo on race day. That's a disaster just waiting to happen. Also, avoid loading up on free samples of sports drink and energy foods, especially ones you've never before used.

5. Hit the Hay...But Not Too Early

Try to get eight hours of sleep, but (unless your race has a really early start) don't go to bed too early. It may cause you wake up too early; then you may have a hard time falling back asleep. Don't worry if you don't get a full eight hours. Actually, don't worry if you only get two hours. Research shows that if you get eight to 10 hours of sleep on a regular basis, then not sleeping the night before the race most likely won't have any adverse effects on race day.



6. Dress for Success

Don't overdress for the race. A good rule of thumb is to dress as if it's 15 degrees warmer than it really is. Your body will warm up at least by that much while running. To keep warm before the race, wear some old sweats to the start. The sweats will keep you warm while you wait and then you can toss them at the start. Goodwill is a great place to pick up cheap sweats that you won't mind discarding. Many races donate the discarded clothing to local homeless shelters.

To avoid a panicked race-day morning, lay out your shorts, singlet/shirt/top (go ahead and pin on the race bib), socks, running shoes, hydration belt, ID, and anything else you'll be wearing or carrying with you on the run. Gumby costume? good in theory...

7. Warm Up

For a half or full marathon, the [pre-race warm-up](#) needs to be minimal. The warm-up should consist of dynamic movements not traditional stretch-n-hold stretches. Five minutes of brisk walking followed by two to three minutes of easy jogging makes a great dynamic warm-up for a half or full marathon. You've got many miles ahead of you. You want to be limber but not worn out before the start.

8. Cool Your Jets

It's very easy to get caught up in the hoopla of the start and before you know it you're running a minute faster than your race pace. Ignore the speedsters around you in the starting corral. Instead, focus on your race pace or even a slightly slower pace when the starting gun sounds. Around mile 18, you'll be glad you didn't burn up that precious fuel at the start.

9. Have a Mantra

When climbing a tough hill or fighting off fatigue, having a mantra can help pull you through a tough stretch. Spend a little time before race day thinking of a few motivating mantras. Some good mantras include,

- Can't stop. Won't stop.
- The pain of discipline or the pain of regret.
- Not everybody can do this!
- I am because I run. I run because I am.
- One step at a time.
- Be fierce. Be bold.
- Run strong. Be brave.
- Go light. Feel brave.

- Think strong. Be strong. Run Strong.
- Make mom proud!



10. Trust and Believe

There are always factors out of your control that may affect race day (crazy weather, extreme temperatures, illness, injury, etc.), but what you can control is your confidence. Trusting your training and believing in yourself as an athlete will help ensure that all the hard work you've put in over the past several months will shine through.

If that pesky voice of doubt begins to creep in, kick it to the curb! Even say it out loud. “Go Away!” Of course the runner beside you may think you're crazy, but hey, whatever works, right?

With the right [race-day](#) preparation, you'll finish with a smile and avoid any surprises on the course.