

# From Runner



# to Racer

Running is the oldest, purest and simplest sport and it offers endless competitive opportunities. We human beings love to challenge ourselves; it's coded somewhere deep in our DNA but you don't have to run fast to have a rewarding run, and you don't have to set a PB to enjoy a race. If you have never raced before, the advice that follows will help you to avoid some of the mistakes we've all made and if you're a seasoned competitor you'll be reminded again of the little things that can make a big difference come race day.

By Nina Anderson

**For the beginner** racing can not only be motivational but also an exciting and unique experience. To participate in a mass event and run for one's own personal goal, whether to raise money for charity or simply reach the finish line while being cheered and clapped by strangers who are willing you to succeed, can bring a huge sense of achievement as well as a boost to self-esteem.

### Which race?

Aim to participate in an event where all aspects are geared towards the achievement of the goal, whatever that may be. Before choosing which race or races it is important to think about this goal and how the following variations will affect performance:-

- **Course terrain – hilly, road, mixed or flat** - to race on a hilly or undulating course will incorporate strength training and therefore be of benefit. In some cases it is the challenge of tough terrain which is the primary factor in choosing such an event. If the aim is a PB, then to opt for a flat course is going to be advantageous
- **Distance** – There are a wide variety of races. All distances are covered from the shortest (60m on an indoor track) up to marathon and ultra distance
- **Weather** – whilst the weather cannot be predicted, it is important

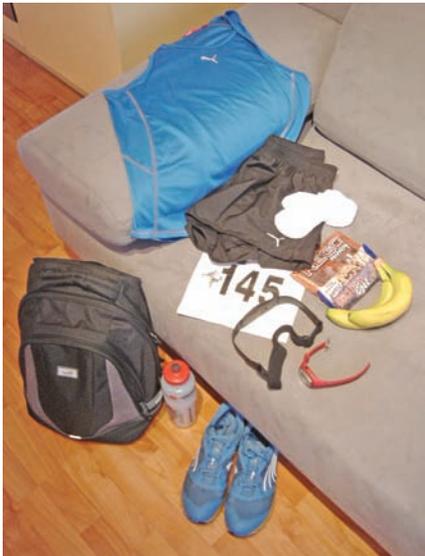
to remember that if the aim is to race in Summer, heat and humidity can affect performance. Some people thrive on training in heat, whilst others feel discomfort and struggle to maintain hydration. This factor is important to consider as many races are planned months in advance

- **Ability** – choose a race that matches personal ability and make it a realistic and achievable target
- **Type** – some charity races and fun runs are specifically aimed at the novice runner and these can be a very good starting point

## Tapering

This is the name given to the phase of preparation before the race, where the training load is reduced. It allows the muscles to recover whilst effecting positive physiological changes. These factors can help a runner attain an optimum performance on race day. Studies have shown that it is vital to continue to train at a high intensity during this period of reduced volume, as this is a key element in maintaining fitness. In short, it is necessary to reduce training volume to allow the essential adaptations to take place, but not too much or fitness will be compromised. This is a difficult balance to achieve and races could be won or lost on the strength of it. A taper can range from a few days to a number of weeks depending upon the specific event, together with the runner's individual ability to adapt and recover. This would be tried and tested during training.

## Pre-Race Plan



### Planning is both helpful and necessary and should include:-

- **Travel** – bus or train timetables should always be checked. Set aside enough time to allow for all eventualities (road works, parking, late pick-up, rail engineering work) in order to avoid any stress
- **Documents** – read the race information carefully and check details such as the course itself including inclines, drink stations and start times if staggered, as this will affect when to begin the warm-up
- **Food** – ensure a pre-race meal is eaten and allow sufficient time for it to be digested. Food and eating times should already be well rehearsed. In addition, plan race food and drinks. If gels or energy drinks are necessary, it is important to know at which point in the race they will be needed. These should only be used if they have already been

## Take Home Message

- Races may be used to try out different tactics
- They can be a means of sharpening up for a more important race at a later date (e.g. a 3k track runner may compete in 1500m)
- They can be used as part of a training programme. A runner may compete in a number of races of varying distance in the lead up to a main competition. For example, if the aim is a marathon, training races may incorporate 10ks, 10 milers, 1/2 marathons and longer. If the goal is a major X-country race in January, to compete in x-country races throughout the Winter may help to ensure that the runner is 'race fit' for the main competition
- A race can be used as a point of reference to indicate the stage training has reached and so analyse areas which require improvement
- Races give quantifiable measures of progression



tested successfully in training. Whilst they are extremely helpful to many runners some have to experiment with different brands in order to find a product which suits them

- **Clothes** – bring plenty of warm clothes for before and after the race and find out where these can be left

- **Extras** – take safety pins, toilet paper (porta-loos can run out), water bottles, money etc

## Race Plan

A race plan is geared towards the individual goal. This could merely be to finish the race, to try out a specific tactic, or to run in a particular way i.e. evenly paced miles or a negative split (where the second half of the race is quicker than the first). Whatever the goal may be, it is helpful to have a clear idea prior to the start as to how this may be achieved. Calculate the pace prior to race day e.g. if the aim is a 45 minute 10k this would mean running each kilometre in 4 1/2 minutes. Take into account that pace may alter going uphill and on occasion the distance markers will be incorrect. It is vital to have already trained at race pace as this speed will then be both familiar and instinctive in the race itself.

## Nutrition

### Sports nutritionist Roz Kadir works with athletes from elite internationals to beginners and she has the following recommendations:-

- Just as you spend time preparing for your race, you also need to ensure that your body is receiving the correct fuel at the appropriate time in order to provide a steady supply of energy when needed
- Some runners find it difficult to eat on race day due to nerves. Foods taken in a liquid form empty out of the stomach quickly and require less energy to digest. A great liquid breakfast contains protein powder, fruit and ground almonds with yoghurt and milk
- If you can eat, then remember that protein takes 3 hours to digest and carbohydrates just 1 hour. Practice different timings to see what works for you
- Ensure you keep well hydrated. Your urine should resemble champagne in colour unless you've just taken a multivitamin as B2 makes it more orange
- If you have decided that it is necessary to have gels/energy drinks during your race these should consist of high glycaemic index carbohydrates and should also be consumed immediately after racing.
- It is very important to have a combination of carbohydrates and proteins within 2 hours of finishing the race. At this time your body is like a sponge and it is therefore easier to replenish glycogen stores. Research has shown that to have protein post race helps the absorption of carbohydrates
- Try out anything new during training and at least a few weeks prior to race day. Do not make any changes on the day itself

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For detailed training plans for 5k, 10k, half-marathon and marathon distances go to our website [www.ultra-fitmagazine.com](http://www.ultra-fitmagazine.com).

### The Race

Nerves are to be expected, and it is beneficial to try to maintain a positive mental attitude on the day. In an ideal situation the race-specific training already undertaken should give a runner a great deal of confidence in their ability. As a general rule try to stick to the pre-race plan, and ideally run an even pace i.e. similar times for the first and second half.

### Post race

As with any training session it is necessary to do a recovery jog (or cool down) after the race. This helps the heart rate return to its normal state and at the same time flush out any toxins which may



have accumulated during the run. It is also advisable to spend ten minutes stretching the leg muscles after the cool-down. These factors have a direct bearing on muscle recovery and

occur in the body during exercise). Massage can release and stretch out tight muscles, ease aches and pains, and treat any adhesions caused by stress placed upon the body during the race. Treatment, (particularly the depth of the massage and the techniques

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the level of fatigue that could be felt in the following days.

At many events massage is available after the race. Ruth Staff, a Sports Massage Therapist says ‘Post race treatment is particularly effective in speeding up recovery and therefore preparing the athlete for their next event or training session. The mechanical effect of massage brings fresh blood and nutrients to the muscles and also helps in the removal of waste (metabolic waste is produced by the chemical processes which

used) will depend upon the intensity of the activity undertaken together with the length of time which has elapsed since the finish of the race. For example, a runner who is given a massage 15 minutes after completing a marathon will require a different treatment to that of a 1500m athlete who has a massage two days after racing.’ **UF**

### NEXT ISSUE

**Running injuries are a common and frustrating problem. In the next issue Nina explains the importance of training with injury prevention in mind.**

## Update of Case Study Shân Hughes (Age - 52)

	Initial	After 24 weeks
weight	110.2kg	106.9kg
% fat	47.50%	45%



Shân’s fitness regime is continuing to progress satisfactorily. She says ‘I love gardening but in the past I always ached and felt very sore the day after I had done any work. Now I can garden for a number of hours without feeling any ill effects. I can also walk for over an hour and a half without getting tired. I feel that these improvements in my fitness are quite exciting.’

Shân’s running has advanced to such an extent that she feels she would like the challenge of competing in a race. After looking at a variety of different events she has decided to enter the Hydro Active Women’s Challenge in Hyde Park on Sunday 16th September 2007. It is marketed as ‘UK’s premier 5k women’s road running event’ and Shân hopes it will be an empowering experience.

You can follow Shân’s programme at [www.ninaanderson.com/publications.shtml](http://www.ninaanderson.com/publications.shtml)

**Nina** has a passion for athletics and fitness. She started jogging at the relatively late age of 25, and only stepped on to the track for the first time four years later. Now, at the age of 35, she is a competitive athlete (400m and 800m). As an athletics coach she specialises in technical drills, strength and conditioning, and designing individual running programmes. Together with this, Nina works as a Fitness Mentor with a very wide range of clients. [www.ninaanderson.com](http://www.ninaanderson.com)



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