

# How to train for a Marathon



**MOST READERS** of this column might have noticed that I'm a bit of a sports fanatic. Yes, I admit it: I'm an exercise addict who needs his daily fix.

Some of this might have to do with the fact that I passed the milepost of 40 a couple of years ago. Realisation of mortality is a good incentive for one to get moving. Some of it is in my DNA – I have been doing sports since I was a kid.

The main reason, however, is that working out makes me feel good. One hour of exercise gives me two hours of extra energy per day. Sports, healthy food and sufficient sleep is an unbeatable combination.

**I believe** in doing multisports, everything from biking to swimming and from body pumping to core exercises. With my hectic travel schedule, running is probably the easiest way for me to stay fit. The gear is easy to pack. And if I can't run in the city I will always find a treadmill at the hotel in which I'm staying.

I'm not a natural runner. At 189 centimetres and 79 kilograms, I'm actually a bit of a hippopotamus in the world of running gazelles.

I started running marathons less than three years ago. Since then I've run seven marathons – twice in Helsinki and once in Brussels, Amsterdam, Berlin and Stockholm. I've also taken part in an Ironman triathlon in Frankfurt.

I've been fortunate to learn about the art of running from Finnish coaching legend Timo Vuorimaa. Together we have been able to progressively improve my marathon time from four hours to three hours and 20 minutes. My most recent marathon was in Sweden on June 5.

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**My training philosophy** is a simple one. A successful marathon requires a 12–16-week training programme. Each week consists of three intensive runs and two lighter runs or cross-training days (biking or swimming, for instance).

One weekly run should be long and slow, somewhere between 20 and 30 kilometres long. This will build your endurance. Another quality training session consists of intervals. I often improve my pace in a 5 x 1000-metre or 4 x 2000-metre workout. Remember to

recover for two minutes between sets.

For me, the third quality session of the week is often all about hills. I love running hills; it's a great way to work on my technique. Try to find a gentle, but sufficiently steep hill and ascend for ten 60-second repetitions. If you don't like hills you can go for flat intervals (15 200-metre segments or so).

**The key** to training for a marathon is variation. You should not be running the same distance at the same monotonous pace. Keeping it varied is much more fun. Put in a few five, ten, or 21-kilometre races to motivate yourself.

I also urge you to start out easy. Don't increase your distance or pace by more than 10 per cent a week. Many eager runners, like myself, find out about overtraining the hard way. Injury is never fun, so avoid it by using common sense. Start slowly and take a week off if you feel tired.

This year sees the 2500th anniversary of the legendary run from Marathon to Athens. It's a good excuse for all of us to get out our running shoes. And no matter how well you train, prepare for the unexpected. That's what running a marathon is all about. ■

**Running is the easiest way for me to stay fit.**