



Intermediate

Training Plan



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Introduction

Before you begin . . .

From beginning your training to lining up at the start and finishing, preparing for and running in the Flora London Marathon is a fantastic experience that you will never forget. This intermediate training plan focuses on everything you need to get started, sensible precautions to take and also contains a week-by-week structured programme that will develop you into a fitter, healthier, marathon runner. However, before you don your trainers and start that first training session, take a little time out to check a few safety considerations before you begin.

Safety first

To start with, it is vitally important to ensure that it is safe for you to begin an exercise programme. Complete the safety checklist below and if you answer YES to one or more questions, or alternatively, if you are at all concerned about starting training, then make an appointment with your doctor for a check-up before you start.

Health-status safety checklist

- | | | |
|---|---|---------------------------|
| 1 | Are you aged over 30 and/or have not exercised for some time? | <input type="radio"/> Y/N |
| 2 | Do you suffer from any medical conditions? | <input type="radio"/> Y/N |
| 3 | Are you a smoker or have recently given up smoking? | <input type="radio"/> Y/N |
| 4 | Have you undergone any surgery in the past two years? | <input type="radio"/> Y/N |
| 5 | Are you suffering from any injuries? | <input type="radio"/> Y/N |
| 6 | Are you currently on any prescribed medication? | <input type="radio"/> Y/N |
| 7 | Are you unsure about beginning an exercise programme? | <input type="radio"/> Y/N |

Once you have the all-clear from your doctor then you're ready to step out on the road to marathon fitness.



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● The Flora London Marathon

The Flora London Marathon is officially the biggest, best organised mass participation marathon in the world. It was the brainchild of the late Chris Brasher, who dubbed it 'the great suburban Everest' and one of his organising aims was that people could compete side-by-side, having fun and a sense of achievement. It is the scene of Paula Radcliffe's incredible world records and countless other memorable performances and since its inception in 1981, there have been over 600,000 finishers and in excess of £200 million has been raised for charity.

The famous route from Blackheath Common, alongside the river Thames and through to the spectacular finish outside Buckingham Palace, is flat, fast and steeped in historical landmarks. Running 'The London' has now become a major goal for all running abilities and is genuinely achievable with correct training. Completing this prestigious event is a magnificent achievement wherever you finish in the field and this training plan steps you through to race day and includes a multitude of tips and advice to help you reach your marathon goal.

● Key event information

In keeping with its status as the best marathon in the world, the Flora London Marathon caters for every eventuality through a combination of formidable organisation and the experience of staging the race over 25 years. From a competitor's perspective, here is a brief alphabetical selection of key points that will enhance your race day experience:

Baggage transport: The race follows a point-to-point course and runners' belongings are transported by specially numbered baggage lorries from the start to the finish.



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Finish area: On finishing, as well as receiving your medal and t-shirt, you are provided with water, a goody bag containing some very welcome food, a space blanket to keep warm and your official timing chip is removed. The baggage lorries will be in position and on presentation of your race number, marshals will return your kitbag to you.

Hydration: From mile three, there are water stations at every mile and high energy sports drinks are also provided every five miles.

Mile and kilometre markers: Every mile is marked with a large gantry straddling the road so that you can monitor your pace throughout the event and tick off the distances as you progress. Kilometre markings are every 5km (3.1 miles).

Race day travelling: On the day of the race, runners can travel free on the London underground by showing their official race number to underground staff.

Registration: In the week before the race, final registration takes place in London where you receive your race number, clothing kitbag, timing chip and final instructions.

Start area: Water, high energy sports drinks and shelter (if required) is provided at the start. There are ample toilet facilities and an announcer will advise by loudspeaker when you should line up. Your start position will be determined by your race number and marshals are on hand to direct you to the correct area.



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Temperature: April can be an unpredictable month weather-wise and if conditions are hot, special showers are provided en route to help runners stay cool.

Terrain: The entire race is run on well tarmacked roads, with the challenging cobbles section at mile 23 now rerouted. The course is very flat, with only very minor undulations.

Timing: At registration, every runner is issued with a unique timing chip that you fasten to your training shoe. This automatically records your start and finish times, as well as split times at various points around the course.

Toilets: As well as at the start and finish, toilet facilities are located around the course and signposted well in advance.

Wheelchair suitability: The course is well suited to wheelchair racers, particularly now that the cobbles section has been taken out.



1 Getting started

● What gear do I need?

On your route towards improved marathon fitness, you need minimal equipment. Running is a very simple sport and luckily requires very little specialist kit. The most important point is that you have suitable clothing (particularly footwear) and that you feel comfortable in everything. The most technical and most important kit you need to buy are your running shoes and to replace them regularly. Running shoes have evolved over the past ten years into sophisticated pieces of technology of which each manufacturer has developed their own version.

Shoes

Correct footwear is one area where you should never compromise. Good running shoes are an investment in comfort, protection and injury prevention and it is worth visiting a specialist sports footwear retailer rather than a chain store and discussing your requirements with them. A specialist retailer with gait analysis and pressure plate testing will be able to assess your requirements and recommend suitable shoes for your particular gait and running style. Good shoes will last and your initial investment will be repaid many times over and if you calculate the 'pence-per-session' cost of your shoes, you will find them extremely good value.



Socks

The most advanced socks are designed for the appropriate foot i.e. they are left and right specific. The specific foot socks have a great benefit in that they hug the foot better and there is no excess sock floating around in the shoe which may cause blisters. As with most things nowadays, you get what you pay for and a £1 pair of socks won't give you as much comfort as an £8 pair.

Shorts and tights

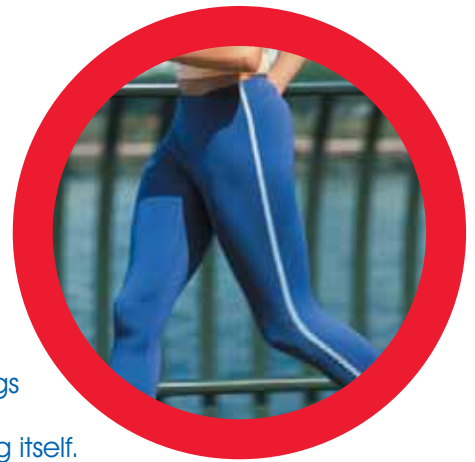
After socks come shorts; or when it is colder tights. Shorts should be comfortable, lightweight and have the ability to wick away sweat when you train. Most running shorts now come with a pant liner so you don't have to wear anything else with them. This is good but you have to try them on first as some of the inners can be a little restrictive if you don't get the right size. Most shorts come with elastic waist bands and the more expensive ones come with a draw string as well.

It is worth paying a little extra to get the draw string as you can tie the shorts to your specification as opposed to relying on the elastic to hold them up.



Elastic-only shorts often move down a little, especially in wet conditions. Your shorts shouldn't be so tight that they cut off circulation round your waist but conversely they shouldn't be so loose that they flap around all the time either. Finally, check the slit up the side, often this is quite large to allow for a greater ventilation and freedom of movement but make sure you are happy with how much leg it actually shows when you run.

When the weather is colder it is advisable to wear tights to keep your legs warmer and thus reduce the chance of injury. Fabric technology has exploded recently with the aid of new synthetic materials and NASA technology. This has aided running no end with high tech materials filtering down to basic running kit like tights and t-shirts. The running tights that are available hug the legs more efficiently and stop the wind and rain penetrating to the leg itself.



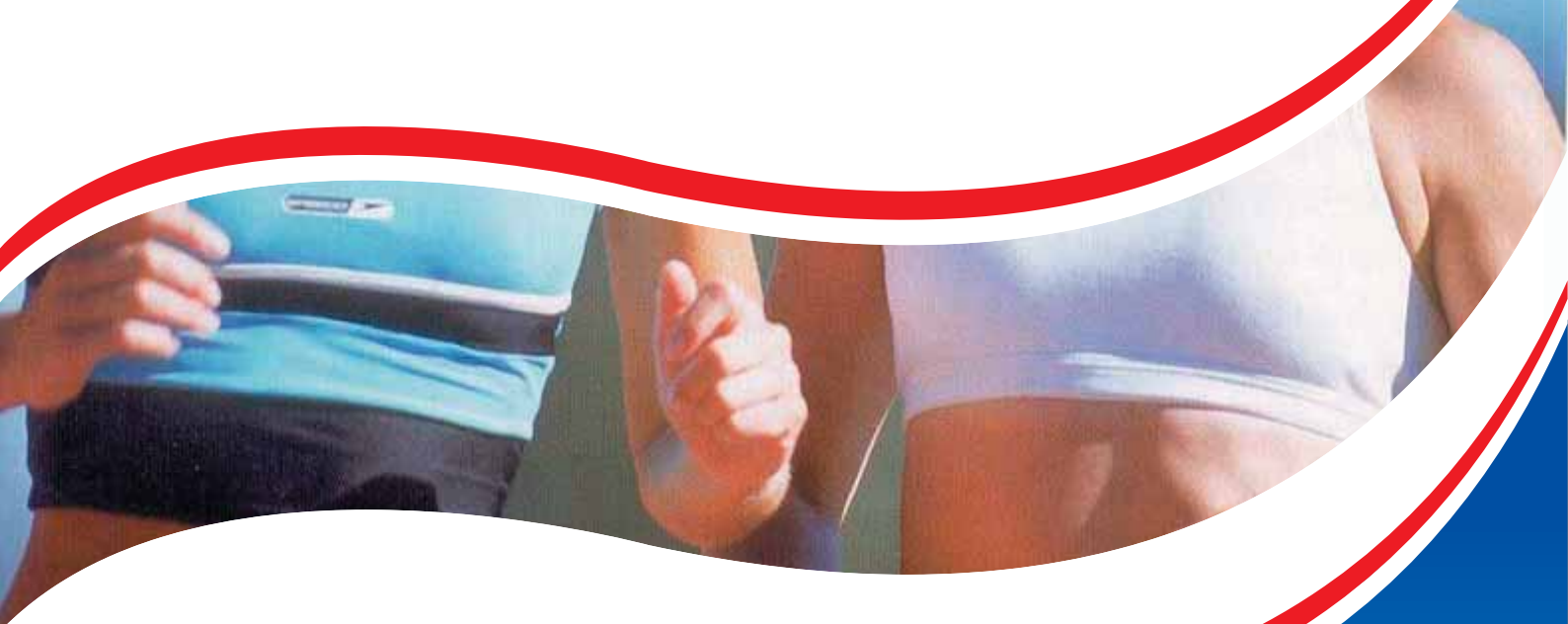
This helps in reducing injuries from cold muscles and also means that you can enjoy running when the weather is a little worse than ideal. Only diehard older runners now wear loose fitting cotton tights.

The fashionable and technological knowledgeable runners are choosing high tech garments that help them in their running. Your tights should be snug fitting and comfortable. It is important to try them on before you buy because many manufacturers have different cuts to suit different styles of runner. Generally the more expensive the tight then the more comfortable they will be and the better at keeping you cool in summer and warm in winter.

Tops

Short and long sleeve t-shirts have also benefited, like tights, from technological advances. The mid to top range t-shirts all wick away sweat to keep you cooler and allow a greater air circulation through the fabric. They feel very lightweight but have the properties to keep you warm or cool depending on when and how you wear them. Running t-shirts should be reasonably tight but not figure-hugging and likewise they shouldn't flap around when you run in them. It is a fine balance between well fitted and slightly baggy that you should aim for. With long sleeve t-shirts; you should aim to get ones with cuffed sleeves so they stay down around your wrists. If there are no cuffs then the sleeves often ride up your arms when you run and this can be both annoying and cold.

Similarly, for hot weather training, vests are also designed with technological, wicking fabrics that also help air circulate around your body to aid cooling.





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When the weather gets really cold or wet it is advisable to run in a gillet or a long sleeve waterproof top. These offer excellent wind-stopping and rain-resistance capabilities and can keep you warm and dry throughout any run. Gillets are sleeveless jackets and ideal for quicker running in slightly warmer climates while full long sleeve waterproofs are better for colder and wetter climates. These types of tops are multi-purpose because they can be used casually as well and the ones at the top end are very high tech and guaranteed waterproof and windproof. Cheaper versions will be fine for most running conditions but they will sacrifice certain aspects like being 100% waterproof or windproof. Being prepared for cooler conditions enables you to stay warm, dry and enjoy the run more. In warmer climates the new fabrics and technologies enable you to train harder by staying cooler and wicking away sweat and moisture from the body. Both of these mean you can't blame the weather for not training anymore and you can get and stay fitter all year round now in comfort and style.



Gloves

These should be lightweight and comfortable. Only in extreme weather will you need to wear thick running gloves (which even in the UK should be unlikely through the summer!) and more often than not, you will heat up enough to be okay in the normal thin type.

Woollen gloves are the norm because they are cheap to buy but they don't offer the same waterproof and wind stopper capabilities of the new high tech fabrics. Woollen gloves will be fine for most runners but if you are venturing out into colder or very wet climates, it is worth investing in a high tech pair. Running with cold hands can ruin the experience for you, so choose carefully when you buy, especially if it is near wintertime.



Hats

Hats are similar to gloves in that woollen ones are the norm because they are easy to get hold of and cheap. The more high tech versions such as fleece offer wind stopping capabilities and some are waterproof as well. Caps have become more fashionable recently and are favoured by younger runners. Caps offer greater protection from the rain, snow and sun but often they can get blown off in windy conditions. They don't offer the same warmth capabilities as woollen or high tech fabrics but they are good when you need better protection from the elements. In addition, they are better for runners who wear glasses because they help the glasses from getting rain or snow on.



Sports bras

It is important to wear a sports bra that fits you snugly and gives adequate support for running. The bust is only held in place by the skin around it and the Coopers Ligaments, when the bust moves, these ligaments can stretch resulting in a permanent droop. In addition, this movement can be painful and leads many women to avoid certain activities that could be enjoyed with a good sports bra!

Everyone is different and you may well need to try on a few different products before finding what is just right for you.

● So does your sports bra fit?

- Your bra should fit snugly under the bust without being uncomfortably tight.
- All of your bust should fit in the bra without any bulges around the sides.
- The shoulder straps should not dig in (for larger busts wider straps are more comfortable).
- When you run there should be significantly less bounce than with a normal bra
- Most ladies should only need to wear one sports bra even for high impact activities.

There are many excellent bras on the market, which come in a large range of sizes and colours offering every different level of support.



2 Principles of training

It is common to think that when a training improvement is made, for example running further or running a faster time over a particular distance, that the improvement has been made at that specific time. In fact that is not the case; the improvement has been made some time previously, following an earlier training session. During the training session, it is the measurable results that are registered in the form of quicker times or further distances. This is because of the way the body responds to training. When exercising, the body is challenged. Following a training session, when the body is at rest, it adapts, gets stronger and improvements can be measured during a subsequent session. Hence the most important component of any training plan is rest, so that the body is able to adapt to training. Less is very often more in the long term and inadequate rest can result in excessive fatigue, loss of motivation and at worst, injury.





3 Structuring your sessions

To get the most out of your training, you should adhere to the following sequence each time you train:

● Warm-up

The warm-up, raises the heart-rate, gets blood flowing to the working muscles and prepares the body for exercise. It should be for a minimum of five minutes and replicate the movements or activities of the main session.

For example: when beginning a run, 5-10 minutes very easy jogging will prime the body for the main training session.

● Mobility

Some basic actions to put the limbs through the range of movement that the main session requires, will ensure the joints are loosened up, lubricated and will function more efficiently.

● Main session

This will form the bulk of the training session, for example: a brisk 35 minute run.



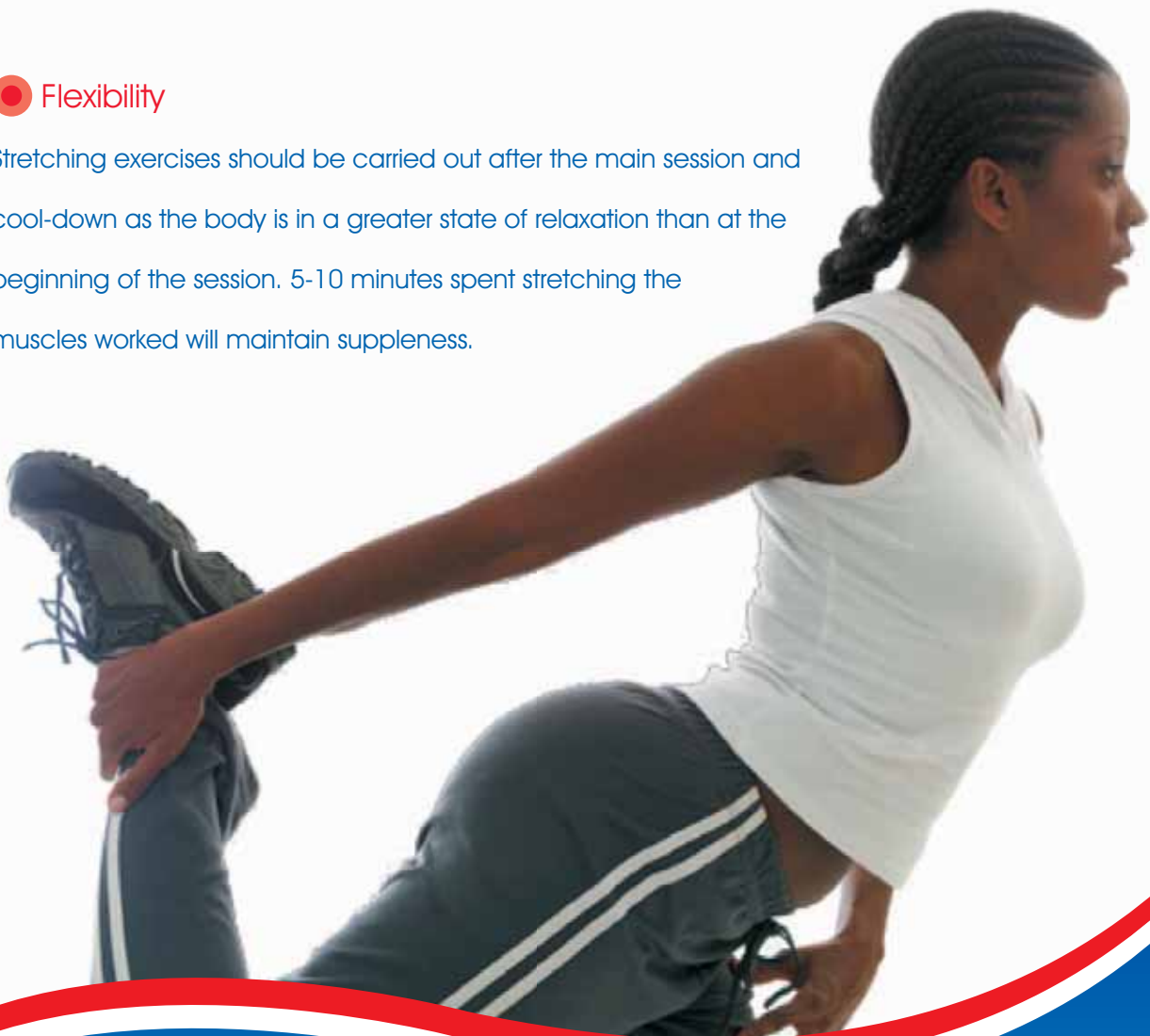
● Cool-down

The cool-down should be at a lower intensity than the main session and should bring the body temperature and heart rate closer to pre-exercise levels. Additionally, waste by-products of exercise will be flushed from the muscles and tissues, accelerating recovery before the next training session.

For example: the cool-down should be a minimum of 5-10 minutes light cardiovascular (CV) exercise. Jogging or walking is ideal.

● Flexibility

Stretching exercises should be carried out after the main session and cool-down as the body is in a greater state of relaxation than at the beginning of the session. 5-10 minutes spent stretching the muscles worked will maintain suppleness.



4 Additional training

Obviously running will form the core of all your training because you are training to condition your body to complete 26.2 miles under your own steam. However, it is also beneficial to incorporate other types of training in your programme, so that you line up in London in the best possible shape.

● Flexibility training

There are a multitude of flexibility exercises for stretching every muscle in the body. Primarily, you need to focus on leg stretches to keep your muscles long, supple and injury free. See the realbuzz.com guide: 'Exercises & stretches – The no-nonsense guide' for specific examples of flexibility training. The key is to ensure that the muscles that have been utilised during your workout are stretched at the end of the training session.

For example: at the end of your run and cool-down, spend a few minutes stretching the hamstrings, quadriceps, calves and adductors.

● Cross-training

Cross-training is the name given to other forms of training that complement your running training. Cross-training can be extremely beneficial because it allows your body to recover from a run whilst still providing training benefits. Running is a very repetitive activity that if not carried out correctly, can lead to overuse injuries. By occasionally adding different activities to your programme, you keep fresh and significantly reduce any injury risk.

For example: the day after a long endurance training run, a light swimming session or bike ride will still provide cardiovascular benefits but without the same loading on muscles that have been fatigued from running.

● Resistance training (weight training)

Resistance training is extremely beneficial to complement your running; strengthening all around the body and correcting any muscle imbalances. The range of resistance training exercises for training specific muscles is immense, (see the realbuzz.com guide: 'Exercises & stretches – The no-nonsense guide') and can enhance your running performance through improved posture and all-round strength.

Specific resistance exercises are not included in this plan but if you find that you have time to add in some resistance sessions to your training week, one to two workouts per week is ample. Ensure that your gym sessions are carried out on non-running days to avoid over fatigue and also so that the quality of your running training is not compromised.

For more information on suitable supplementary resistance training, see the realbuzz.com training plan 'Muscle up' for a comprehensive resistance training plan.





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5 Flora London Marathon intermediate 16-week training plan

Plan notes

This plan is a day-by-day 16-week schedule. The plan assumes:

- You are already a runner
- You have been running for a minimum of several months
- You have probably completed a 10k or half marathon event
- You are currently comfortable with training for approximately 4-5 hours per week
- You may have already completed a marathon and are looking to improve your time.

For each session in the plan, follow the protocols for warm-up, mobility, main session, cool-down and flexibility outlined earlier. Start at week one but if your training is slightly ahead, you can jump in at a later week. Simply check the week-by-week chart to see which week matches your current activity levels and then start at that point.



super tip

Don't be a slave to the programme! The training plan is designed with rest days, recovery sessions and lower volume weeks. This will ensure your body has time to adapt to the training. However, every runner is different and if you feel that an extra days rest will be beneficial to your training, simply take out one of the shorter sessions in that week.

There is flexibility within the plan for switching training sessions around during the week to fit in with your other commitments such as work, home, family etc. The key point is to ensure that your training is balanced each week, including flexibility, CV and rest.

If you find it difficult to complete some weeks due to lack of training time, always try to complete the long run sessions. The most important factor with training for the marathon is to build endurance, so try to complete all the long runs.

● Terminology

The plan will frequently refer to the term 'fartlek'. Fartlek is a Swedish word that means speed-play. A fartlek session is an unstructured, quality training session, where instead of running at a uniform pace, you vary the pace throughout the run, depending on how you feel. For example, a 70-minute fartlek session could be:

- Warm-up for 10 minutes
- Run hard for 10 minutes
- Easy jog recovery for 5 minutes
- Alternately sprint and jog for 5 minutes
- Steady running for 10 minutes
- Race pace for 20 minutes
- 10 minutes cool-down

The key thing with a fartlek session is that you simply run as you feel, backing off when you start to tire, speeding up if and when you want to and for as long as you like.

● Training plans

Week 1 Getting started		
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	45 minutes steady run	Try to maintain an even pace.
Tues	Rest	
Wed	60 mins fartlek, ideally off-road	
Thurs	Rest	
Fri	60 mins easy	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	80 mins steady pace	Comfortable effort

Week 2 Introducing mid-week quality		
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	45 mins easy	
Tues	Rest	
Wed	3 x 8-10 mins hard, 3 minutes recovery between efforts + warm-up and cool-down	Aim for consistency
Thurs	Easy 25 min jog	
Fri	50 mins steady pace	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	90 mins	Long, slow run

Week 3		
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	30 mins easy	
Tues	50 min hilly circuit, with efforts on hills	
Wed	Rest	
Thurs	60 mins steady	
Fri	35 mins easy	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	100-110 mins taken very easy	

Week 4		
Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	35 mins steady	
Wed	3 x 8-10 mins hard, 3 minutes recovery between efforts + warm-up and cool-down	Repeat of week 2 session but with more confidence
Thurs	35 min jog	
Fri	50 mins steady	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	50 min fast paced run with warm-up and cool-down	Treat as a race

Week 5

Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	25 min recovery jog	
Tues	Steady 45 mins	
Wed	60 mins off-road and hilly fartlek session	
Thurs	Rest	
Fri	Easy 45 mins	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	120 mins slow	First 2 hour run, take it easy

Week 6

Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	24 mins jog	
Tues	45 mins steady	
Wed	Warm-up, then alternate 3 minute hard bursts with 3 minutes of easy jogging, cool-down	
Thurs	Rest	
Fri	60 mins comfortable pace	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	120-130 mins slow	Don't push; ease back if you feel tired.

Week 7

Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	25 mins very easy	
Tues	45 mins steady	
Wed	60 mins fartlek with long duration efforts	
Thurs	Rest	
Fri	50 mins steady	
Sat	25 mins easy jog	
Sun	90 mins good pace + long warm-up and cool-down	

Week 8 Mini taper and half marathon race

Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	45 mins steady	
Wed	Rest	
Thurs	45 mins steady	
Fri	Rest	
Sat	20 mins very slow jog	Really, really slow
Sun	Half marathon race + warm-up and cool-down	Good effort

Week 9 Building up again

Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	45 mins easy pace	
Wed	4 x 8-10 mins hard, 2½ minutes recovery between efforts + warm-up and cool-down	
Thurs	45 mins easy	
Fri	70 mins at race pace	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	145 mins	Long, slow run

Week 10

Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	25 mins jog recovery	
Tues	45 mins steady	
Wed	Rest	
Thurs	75 mins off-road fartlek	
Fri	45 mins easy	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	160 mins taken easy	Slow start and take drinks.

Week 11

Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	50 mins steady	
Wed	2 x 15 mins hard, 4 minutes recovery between efforts, with warm-up and cool-down	
Thurs	45 mins steady	
Fri	25 mins easy jog	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	180 mins slow, take drinks en route	

Week 12 Mini taper and 10k race

Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	45 mins steady	
Wed	50 mins relaxed fartlek	
Thurs	45 mins steady	
Fri	Rest	
Sat	20 mins easy jog	
Sun	10K race + good warm-up and cool-down	Hard effort

Week 13 Peak week

Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	25 mins easy recovery	
Tues	45 mins steady	
Wed	4 x 15 mins hard, 2½ minutes recovery between efforts + warm-up and cool-down	Try to improve on previous distances
Thurs	35 mins slow	
Fri	50 mins steady	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	200 mins slow	Last long run, be economical.

Week 14 Start of race taper

Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	50 mins steady	
Wed	60 mins easy fartlek	
Thurs	35 mins jog	
Fri	45 mins at marathon race pace	
Sat	Rest	
Sun	130 mins steady	

Week 15 Further tapering

Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	5 mins easy off-road	
Tues	Easy 25 min jog or rest	Rest if tired
Wed	35 mins brisk pace + warm-up and cool-down	
Thurs	45 mins steady	
Fri	Rest	
Sat	25 mins easy	
Sun	50 mins steady	Slower than intended race pace.

Week 16 Final taper and preparation week

Day	Training	Training notes
Mon	Rest	
Tues	Warm-up, 10 mins at race pace, cool-down	
Wed	30 mins very easy	
Thurs	Rest or 25 mins easy	
Fri	Rest	
Sat	15 mins very, very easy jog	
Sun	Flora London Marathon!	THE RACE!



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Well done!

You have come to the end of the 16 week schedule, and your fitness has advanced dramatically. Along the way, you have made significant health and fitness gains, and equally importantly, you have progressed safely. By maintaining your training, you will be making a major contribution to your long-term health and fitness and this intermediate schedule can also serve as a foundation and spring-board to increase your fitness levels further. Statistics show that most runners can continue to improve and progress for at least seven years after they first take up the sport. Now you've advanced and improved, you may be tempted to step up further and try to improve knock more minutes off your finishing time. See the realbuzz.com guides 'Flora London Marathon advanced' for a comprehensive training plan that will help you progress to the next level.

Disclaimer

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