

A full-page photograph of two female runners in a park. The runner on the left is wearing a red tank top and black leggings, while the runner on the right is wearing a black long-sleeved top and black shorts with red trim. They are running on a reddish-brown path, with bare trees and a clear blue sky in the background. Other people are visible in the distance.

A MARATHON EFFORT

With most of the hard work done it's time to sharpen up, [Liz](#) and [Martin Yelling](#) explain how to make the most of your final four weeks, in order to be in the best possible shape on 25th April.

XX MARATHON NEWS www.virginlondonmarathon.com

It probably seems like ages ago that you were leaping up and down excitedly when you found out you'd got your place in the 2010 Virgin London Marathon. Time flies and in only 4 weeks this year's race will be here and you'll be nervously toeing the start line along with 36,000 other runners. The start gun will sound and you'll be off. How the rest of the day goes will be up to you. Your success is in your hands come race day. It's all down to you. But don't worry you definitely won't be alone. You can count on the support of hundreds of thousands of cheering spectators to push you from Blackheath to the Mall. But before you get too excited you've got the final four weeks of your training and preparations to get right first.

The journey to a successful marathon finish is about so much more than the completion of the 26.2 miles on the day. It's about the marathon effort that makes up then training in the weeks and months before the day. Some of the hardest steps to take along the way to a marathon finish are the first ones. But congratulations, you've made it this far!

Training for a marathon isn't easy but rest assured with 4 weeks to go the hardest part of your training and preparation is just about done. The money miles are already in the bank, (or at least they should be). Whether this is your first marathon or you're a seasoned campaigner completing a marathon requires planning, training, effort, and determination – and that's just taking the tube to the start line! >>

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Don't underestimate the importance of these final 4 weeks. It's all too easy at this point to put your race day success in jeopardy through last minute panic, badly planned final weeks training and poor race week preparation. Put the icing on your marathon cake in these last few weeks and come race day your run will be simply delicious!

THINGS YOU SHOULD HAVE DONE:

- **Established a regular running routine**
Your routine should now be engrained in your week. Regular, consistent running makes all the difference come race day.

- **Progressed your long run distance**
These are vital. Overlook your long run at your peril. It's the backbone of a successful marathon.

- **Tried some varied paced running**
One-paced running will get you from start to finish but you can improve your fitness faster and better by including running of different intensities in your mix. Faster running isn't only for 'fast runners'.

- **Decided on a race target time**
You might think you don't need a target time, especially if you 'just want to get round' but to not have an idea in mind about your estimated

finish time is a mistake that could end in tears as you get your pacing wrong.

- **Entered a practice half marathon**
Going through the motions and practicing pre-race routines, kit choices and food timings is essential to keep you calm and in control come big race day. You know what to expect and have practiced how it all works.

THINGS YOU SHOULD DO IN THE NEXT 4 WEEKS.

- **Do some faster running**
- **Nail your race pace**
- **Bank your longest run**
- **Less is more; taper for race day**
- **Get a race day plan**
- **Mentally master your race**

GET THE BEST BANG FOR YOUR RUNNING BUCK

Faster running
Running at 'threshold' pace is about running under 'controlled discomfort' and is great for improving your running economy. After the long endurance runs threshold runs are probably your most valuable workouts. You will find them slightly uncomfortable and they'll require concentration but they are well worth the effort. You'll only be capable of uttering four or

five words as you run. Bank a threshold run or some faster interval running once a week until your final week and this will bring your strong foundations to a race day peak in 4 weeks time.

Nail your race pace
The best marathons are run at a consistent pace for the whole distance. The worst marathons are run by those who hideously over estimate their race pace in the first 6 to 10 miles and then spend the rest of the race trying to minimise their slow down. Practise your marathon pace in training and you'll understand how it feels come race day.

Marathon pace should feel comfortable and you should feel in control. It's easy to get carried away in the first few miles and more so once the initial swell of runners has thinned and you get into your running. Remember, the race gets harder the longer it goes on. Your race will really be run in the final half not the first half. Get your pace wrong in the first 6 miles of your marathon and the final 6 miles could be very painful indeed! Get your pace right for the first half and the second half of your marathon will be a breeze! (Well, maybe not a breeze but certainly more tolerable!). Timing your runs and knowing the distance of them will mean you are able to work out what pace you are >>



running at. For example, if you cover 6miles in one hour then you are running at "10minute miling". You should stand on the start line on April 25th with a clear target time, knowledge of your race pace (in terms of mile and split times, for example, if your goal is to run a sub 4.30 marathon you should know what a 10.16 mile feels) and a clear race strategy to follow to help you achieve your finish goals.

Bank your longest run

The average finish time in the 2009 London Marathon was 4hr41mins – that's a long time to be on the roads - and so your training should see you build up your ability to keep going for long periods of time. Over the past 12 weeks the duration of your longest run should have been gradually progressing. This training has been steadily building your endurance capacity to go the distance. Your legs have been getting used to the repeated pounding, your muscles are stronger, your heart has become more effective at pumping blood around your body and you've become better at utilising your body's energy stores to help keep you going. Long runs also help you concentrate and give you the physical and mental confidence to know you can reach your goal. Runners who complete long runs in their training for a marathon are able to keep their pace going for longer come race day.

As you get fitter your runs should get longer until you are able to cover approx 20-22 miles

as your longest run 4 weeks before the race. That means in the next 4 weeks you've still got time to build to your longest run before hitting a peak then dropping the long run miles down again. The pace of your long runs should be conversational. You could break your long run up and include some specific marathon paced focussed running. For example, on an 18miler try including 4x4miles at target marathon pace, or try running the final 8miles at target marathon pace, or try running the first 6 at target marathon pace, the middle 6 a little slower, and the final 6 at target marathon pace.

Less is more: taper

It's all too easy at this stage to make the classic mistake of ramping up your mileage. Perhaps you feel you're not quite ready, not fit enough and think that doing more is a good idea. Wrong! That would be a schoolboy marathon mistake! Marathon running isn't like a school exam you can't cram the miles into the final few weeks. You will not benefit at all from stacking in long runs or hard runs in the 3 weeks before race day. All this will do is tire you out, increase your risk of injury and illness, and jeopardize your successful race. As the next 4 weeks roll by you should do less not more running! This is known as 'tapering' and will help you reach peak performance come race day.

In the final 4 weeks you need to run smart. You won't lose the fitness you have gained over the past few months, infact backing off will help

get the most of the runs you've been doing and mean you'll be fresher, motivated and energized for a great performance on race day. Any training you do 3 weeks before the race is largely for maintenance peaking and ensuring you are ready to go not ready to drop. To reach your peak, reduce the volume and frequency of your running as the race draws closer. Try this taper strategy: 3 weeks out 90% of normal training, 2 weeks out 60% of training and race week 30% of normal training load.

Get a plan

Don't think it's only serious or speedy runners that require a target time, a race strategy and a plan for race day. If you think having a plan doesn't apply to you because you 'just want to finish' then think again. Establish your race strategy by asking yourself; what is my target time, how do I plan to run the race to achieve this, and what am I going to do before race day and on the day of the race to make this attainable? Being aware of the things you want to go right and knowing how to handle things when they don't go to plan is all a part of making your day worthwhile and rewarding. Don't have any surprises on race day! A well thought through plan keeps you relaxed, focused and in control. You should consider what to eat the night before, where you'll stay, what time you'll get up, what you'll have for breakfast and when you'll have it, how you'll get to your race start zone on the morning, what

you'll wear before the start, what you'll wear to race, your race pace and finish strategy and your repatriation point for friends, family and supporters post-race.

Mentally master the race

Finishing a marathon is as much in the head and the heart as in the legs and lungs. Training your mind as well as your body will help you get through your preparation and the race itself. The longer the race goes on the harder it gets. There's no escaping that. When it gets hard (and it will!) you'll need to draw on every ounce of your physical and mental strength and courage to push through boundaries you'd previously thought were impossible. Grow your confidence to achieve your personal marathon goal in the next 4 weeks by:

- **Running with intent, passion and purpose**
Each time you leave your front door for a training run in March and April ask yourself a simple question. 'Why am I doing this run and what do I want to gain from it? What's the point in investing half your energy and effort when you can give it total commitment? Run with purpose, whether that is to run for longer than you've run before without stopping, run faster, or be disciplined and back off the intensity.

- **Remember why you are running**
Bring meaning to your training and your race.

Remember why completing your marathon matters to you. Are you running in someone's memory? Are you raising money for a Charity cause close to your heart? Are you trying to beat your brother or friend? Do you want a PB? Whatever your personally salient motivator draw inspiration from this in your training. Why is this run important to you? If you do nothing else remember how privileged you all are that you actually can run and are physically able to participate.

• Get in the 'zone'!

Do what you've trained to do! Block out distractions and stay focused on your own race. It doesn't pay to worry about the 'what if's'. Focus your attention on the things you can control, like your pace, the time you arrive at the start, your choice of kit, instead of the things you cannot, like what other people look like, the start time or the weather.

• Believe in yourself

Have belief in your ability to achieve your goals and push your doubts, fears and anxieties out of your head. Be in the moment. Instead of standing on the start line thinking (and worrying) about the prospect of the 26.2 miles that lie ahead, focus on the moment. Take it one step at a time.

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FINAL FOUR WEEKS TRAINING COUNTDOWN!

4 WEEKS TO GO:

Now is time to do your last long run. It should be long enough to give you confidence that you can go the distance but not too long that you feel really tired afterwards (20 to 22miles).

Think about your pre-race routine. Don't leave your accommodation and travel plans until the last minute. Know what you are doing. It'll help you stay relaxed come race day.

Avoid any practical panic on race day. Do a first read through your race instructions. Know where you need to be and when on April 25th.

Get speedy. Include a shorter, faster session in your weekly training.

Practice your energy and hydration strategies on your final long run. If you haven't done so already then try some Lucozade Sport isotonic sports drink and energy gels on your long run, as this is what is available on the course.

3 WEEKS TO GO:

It's taper time! Start to unwind and back off your training. Drop the length of your weekly long run to 16miles. Keep up the frequency of running and continue with one faster session in the week. Just drop the length of it.

Practice your pre-race routine in your 3 weeks to go long run. Wear the same kit

you plan to race in, (even if you plan to run as a giant prawn it pays to know what's in store!), get evening meal and breakfast content and timings sorted.

Be headstrong. This week is about trusting your training. Don't over do it. Include some marathon paced running in at least one run.

Wash your hands regularly. This helps protect you against picking up bugs. The last thing you want now is a cold or cough.

Do your weekend run at the same start time of the marathon starting this week. This will help get your body click adjusted to race time.

2 WEEKS TO GO:

At this stage you should well and truly be into your taper. Your training volume should be reduced by at least 40% this week. Drop your long run to 10-12miles.

Be disciplined. Include a shorter marathon-paced effort this week.

Get speedy! Include a shorter faster workout to keep you feeling sharp and focussed. The aim is to run strong, controlled and feel fresh, positive and ready for your challenge.

Plan your attack. Plan race week thoroughly. Have your travel, accommodation, breakfast, dinner and race strategies all sorted.

Get into the mindset! Run your perfect race through in your head. Imagine watch-

ing a film of your race happening as you'd like it to. See each mile tick away exactly as planned. Feel your controlled heart beat and how strong your feel as the run progresses.

Sleep tight. Adjust your bedtime and aim to get 1hr of extra sleep on 2 nights of the week between now and race day.

RACE WEEK:

You can only do too much this week! You will not get fitter or lose any fitness.

DON'T PANIC! Keep calm leading up to race day! Don't waste nervous energy.

Go mental! Practice your pre-race and race strategy in your mind. Be confident in your ability to complete the race! Replace any negative thoughts with positive ones. Believe in yourself! You are going to do it!

Avoid filling your days with extra jobs and additional pressures. Don't paint the spare room the day before the race! Try and keep some space for downtime and to relax

Fuel up! Eat a high carbohydrate meal the day before your run. Don't try anything new or fancy. Stay hydrated the day before and on the morning of the race.

On the day – CONTROL YOUR PACE FROM THE START. You get your finisher's medal for completing the final 6 miles not the first 6!

FINAL 4 WEEKS. PLAN 1 COMPLETION:

WEEK 13 - Final Long Run
Tues: 30mins ER
Thurs: 40mins SR
Sat or Sun: 3hrs LR

WEEK 14 - Start your taper
Tues: 20mins ER
Thurs: 10mins ER
3x10mins @ target marathon pace (3mins rec)
10 min ER
Sat or Sun: 1hr 45 LR

WEEK 15 - Take care looking after your body. Eat a healthy, balanced diet rich in fruit and vegetables. You're almost there!
Tues: 25mins ER
Thurs: Run10min ER, Run 2min fast, Walk 60s, Repeat 4x, Run 10min ER
Sat or Sun: 1hr ER

WEEK 16 - Race Week: Eat sensibly to fuel up for your race. All the hard work is done! The miles are in the bank. Try to ensure you rest as much as possible in the final few days leading up to your big event. Save your energy!
Tues: 10min ER, Run 1 mile MP, 10min ER
Thurs: 20min ER
Sat: Rest
Sun: **Virgin London Marathon.** Good luck! Stick to your race and pace plan. You've done the training, you've prepared for this event and you are physically and psychologically ready to go the distance.

FINAL 4 WEEKS. PLAN 2 DOING BETTER:

WEEK 13 - Final Long run
Tues: 30min ER
Wed: Rest/gym/swim - including plenty of stretching/mobility.
Thurs: 10min ER, 8x4min IR (2min rec), 10min ER
Sat: 10min ER, 3x12min TR (60s rec), 10min ER
Sun: 3hrs LR - final 60mins run at MP

WEEK 14 - Start your taper. Reduce your training volume.
Tues: 10min ER, 30min MP, 10min ER
Thurs: 45min SR
Sat or Sun: 1hr 45min ER
Practice your fuelling and hydration strategies. Wear the kit and running shoes you plan to complete the marathon in to check or comfort.

WEEK 15 - Take care looking after your body. Eat a healthy, balanced diet rich in fruit and vegetables. You're almost there!
Mon: Rest
Tues: 10min ER, 20min MP then run 4x60s fast runs with 60s walking recovery, 10min ER
Thurs: 30min ER
Sat or Sun: 1hr ER

WEEK 16 - Eat sensibly to fuel up for your race. All the hard work is done! The miles are in the bank. Try to ensure you rest as much as possible in the final few days leading up to your big event. Save your energy!
Mon: Rest
Tues: 10min ER, Run 2x1 mile MP (4mins rec), 10min ER
Thurs: 5min ER, Include 2x100m SR, 5min ER
Sat: Rest
Sun: **Virgin London Marathon.** Good luck. Stick to your race and pace plan. You've done the training, you've prepared for this event and you are physically and psychologically ready to go the distance.

FINAL 4 WEEKS. PLAN 3 GOING FOR IT:

WEEK 13
Tues: 30min SR
Wed: 50min ER
Thurs: 10min ER, 8x4min IR (1min rec), 10min ER
Sat: 10min ER, 3x20min TR (60s rec), 10min ER
Sun: 3hrs LR
Final 60mins run at MP
Practice your fuelling and hydration strategies.

WEEK 14 - Start your taper.
Mon: Rest
Tues: 15min ER, 30mins TR, 15min ER
Wed: 30min ER
Thurs: 45min SR
Fri: Rest
Sat: 1hr ER
Sun: 1hr 45min SR, First and final 15mins MP
Practice your fuelling and hydration strategies. Wear the kit and running shoes you plan to complete the marathon in to check for comfort.

WEEK 15 - Take care looking after your body. Eat a healthy, balanced diet rich in fruit and vegetables. You are almost there!
Mon: Rest
Tues: 10min ER, 20min MP (3mins rec) then run 6x60s fast runs with 60s walking recovery, 10min ER
Wed: 30min ER
Thurs: 10min ER, 4x3mins TR (2mins rec), 10min ER
Fri: Rest
Sat: Rest
Sun: 1hr ER

WEEK 16 - Eat sensibly to fuel up for your race. All the hard work is done! The miles are in the bank. Try to ensure you rest as much as possible in the final few days leading up to your big event. Save your energy!
Mon: Rest
Tues: 10min ER, 2x1 mile MP, 10min ER
Wed: 20min ER
Thurs: Rest
Fri: 5min ER, 3x100m SR (60s rec) 5min ER
Sat: Rest
Sun: **Virgin London Marathon.** Good luck. Stick to your race and pace plan. You've done the training, you've prepared for this event and you are physically and psychologically ready to go the distance.