

**4-HOUR MARATHON:
THE BULLETPROOF GUIDE TO BREAKING
THE 4-HOUR BARRIER**

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Published internationally by Broadsea Press

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INTRO

A marathon is simply 26.2 miles of footwork.

If you took a random sample of, say, 100 people from your country – regardless of age, fitness level, background, etc. – then the truth is that the majority of them would be capable of covering 26.2 miles on foot.

Most of them wouldn't be very fast – in fact, almost everybody would walk the majority of the way. They'd stop for long breaks. A few of them would get injured, or get too tired. Some would be physically incapable of completing the distance, but most would grudgingly manage to finish it. Most of us can walk for a long time, after all. This would just be a very long walk.

This is where marathons come in.

With marathons, the aim is to *run*.

And not just run, but run *continuously*. Sure, we all get a little bit fatigued and might have to walk for brief spells. But for most of us, the whole point of committing to a marathon is to try and run the whole thing.

But what is so significant about four hours? It just so happens that it takes most well-prepared marathon runners somewhere between three and five hours to complete the course. In a recent

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London marathon, the average mens finishing time was 4:04:23 (the average women's time was 4:39:27 – while it's a little slower, the females are catching up quickly).

This means that anyone breaking the four-hour benchmark is not just a marathon runner – they're a pretty good marathon runner.

Running a marathon in under four hours means you've sustained an average pace of at least 6.55 miles per hour for 26.2 miles – it's a badge of honour that shows not just endurance, but a good level of underlying fitness and training behind it.

The four-hour benchmark has become an important line in the sand, it can be said. The difference between a 3hr 59min finishing time and 4hr 1min is a lot more than two minutes if you're a marathon runner.

I ran my first marathon in 3hr 58min. The first half of the marathon had been a breeze, taking me 1 hour 40 mins – I thought “*this is great, I'm going to cruise round*”. The second half was a different story. My legs locked up, I walked for long sections and even when I ran it felt like I was running on the spot. Every inch of my body was telling me to just stop. Somehow, I dug deep and pushed the ‘override’ button on what my body was telling me. Fuelled by pride and resolve, I pushed on and crossed the finish line a smidgeon under the four-hour mark.

It wasn't the most graceful marathon effort, and by the end I was running on sheer determination. I could barely get up and down the stairs in the

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following days, and swore I'd never do another marathon.

Needless to say it took about a week before my enthusiasm returned and I started looking for my next marathon. My tough experience on my first full marathon told me that I had prepared poorly, but the feeling of elation I got from finishing was addictive – I wanted to be *better* at this.

This started me on the path to researching marathon running in-depth – talking with veteran runners, trainers and physiotherapists to learn how I could improve not just my speed but my ability to run a marathon comfortably. I adopted a more structured training approach, and have applied the lessons learned to run dozens of marathons in the years since that first attempt.

I've also went on to help and coach many people through their marathon training and preparation – initially with friends, and then later online through my website.

Through these experiences I've developed training plans and principles that have been downloaded thousands of times, helping many runners to achieve their goals.

The goal I have, and try to instil in others, is not just to finish a marathon in a good time, but to finish it **comfortably**. This means that at the finish line you're able to smile and enjoy the feeling of satisfaction that comes with your accomplishment.

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Sometimes people sign up for a marathon and immediately know what their target finish time is going to be. Many aim for under four hours. Most of us, however, usually have a vague target, but don't want to commit too hard to it – we'll '*see how it goes*', avoiding the potential disappointment of not hitting our goals. When I am helping someone prepare for a marathon – especially first-timers – and ask them what their goals are, the answer is often an unsure 'I'll just try and finish'.

The truth is, having a specific finishing time in mind is great for your training. It gives you structure and a tangible target, something you can work around and strive towards.

I began to ask people if they would like to train specifically to beat the 4-hr mark, and was surprised when the majority of responses were 'yes – that's exactly what I've been looking for!'.

So that is how this book came about. I decided to lay out, in detail, how to prepare and train for a marathon with the specific goal of running it comfortably in under four hours. The training plans detailed here, as well as every piece of advice, has been reverse-engineered from the end-goal of a sub 4-hr time.

Many runners who aren't specific with their goals don't train smart, or don't mentally commit to their training regime – and their marathon suffers because of it.

In this book, I've distilled your marathon preparation and training down to the fundamental building blocks required to run a 4-hr marathon.

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For example, now you know what your target time is, we can already calculate the exact pace you will have to consistently run on the day of your marathon. Now, we can build a training plan for you that gets you up to that pace, then ensures you can comfortably maintain it for (just under) four hours come race day.

The one mandatory item you're going to need a GPS watch, or at least a smartphone with reliable GPS, so you can accurately measure your pace in training.

A 4-hr marathon is achievable for almost anybody, but your chances of success will also depend on:

- Your level of underlying fitness
- The amount of time you have to train
- Being able to avoid / deal with injuries

All of these are tackled in the chapters that follow. I've also included dedicated chapters on running gear – that's shoes, clothing and any gadgets or extras you might want to take.

Training is not the only part of marathon preparation. You also have to check all your gear is suitable, research your race, have race strategies for pacing, fuelling and hydrating – as well as knowing what to do if the wheels fall off (it happens to all of us at least once). To that end, I've included a lot of pre-race advice and checklists for you to follow as the big day approaches.

To boil it all down, my key principles to 4-hr marathon success:

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1. Design A Robust Training Plan (and stick to it from day one)
2. Stay Injury Free (even if it means taking a day off)
3. Train based on Pace, not Distance
4. Get The Right Gear
5. Prepare exhaustively.

Here's a preview of what we're going to cover in the chapters that follow:

- **Getting started.** This section is all about laying out the entire training and race process. We look at the mental and physical commitment you've made, what to expect and how best to prepare yourself in the coming months. I also dive deeper into the five key principles listed above.
- **Training.** We go into detail on how to get from your current state to race-ready. Marathon training these days is a science, not an art – and the lessons learned from countless other runners can be deconstructed and applied to your own training. Example training plans are included here.
- **Shoes and gear.** Have the correct shoes and running gear is fundamental for success.

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We break down every piece of gear you need to run a marathon, and all the optional extras too. We discuss what to look for when you're buying shoes, shorts and everything else.

- **Nutrition.** Fuel is what gets you round the race, but it comes in many different forms – and everyone's stomach is different. We look at the various fuelling options to have before and during a race, as well as discussing your fuelling strategy and how to road-test it before the race.
- **Pre-Marathon – the 4 weeks before the marathon.** I explain where your focus should be at various milestones – four weeks before the race, one week before the race, the night before the race and the morning of the race. Here we discuss tapering and cross-training, diet and the mental preparation required so you get to the start-line in optimal condition.
- **The Marathon.** The actual marathon is the culmination of all your training in one event. Here we go through what to expect on the day itself – this section contains a lot of advice and tips from experienced marathon runners.
- **Post-Marathon.** What to expect, how to minimise recovery time – and how to retain your new level of distance running ability.

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I've endeavoured to include all the information I think you'll need to beat the 4-hr mark in your marathon. However, if you still have questions, drop me a line (hi@marathonhandbook.com) and I'll do my best to help you.

Remember to subscribe to my mailing list at marathonhandbook.com for regular updates, blogs and articles, as well as a free PDF version of my 100-page comprehensive Marathon Handbook eBook (How to Train For And Run A Marathon), with:

- More training plans,
- More detailed advice on general marathon running.
- More detail on marathon preparation without a specific time goal

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CHAPTER 1: GETTING STARTED

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