

# »» SUB 4 HOUR MARATHON TRAINING PLAN

Hey there – Thomas from Marathon Handbook here. Thanks for taking the time to grab a copy of this plan!  
As the name suggests, this plan has been backwards-engineered around the goal of running a sub 4 hour marathon.

For a full breakdown of the strategy I recommend, check out this article or my Youtube video covering the sub 4-hr marathon approach:

[How To Train For And Run a Sub 4-Hour Marathon \(article\)](#)

## ARE YOU READY TO TAKE ON THIS PLAN?

If this is your first marathon, I suggest using a [training plan without a specific time goal](#).

If you have run a marathon or two, you already have a good idea of your current fitness level. Depending on the results of a time trial, you can see if this plan is appropriate for you.

To ensure you are ready to take on this time-based training plan, take a 3K or 5K test or use a recent road race result. These tests should be an all-out effort that you can hold for the duration of that specific distance.

**The suggested results to take on this training plan are the following: 3K in 14:43, 5K in 25:15, or 10K in 52:24**

## TRAINING METHOD

Since we are aiming for a specific time goal, we will combine two training methods: rate of Perceived Exertion and Pace Training.

Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE) is a method of training based on perception or how you feel. The scale ranges from 1 to 10, with 1 being extremely comfortable and 10 being an all-out sprint. [Here is a complete explanation of RPE.](#)

Pace Training, on the other hand, will be all about maintaining a specific pace, measured in minutes per kilometer or mile, for specific intervals during your run. It's like setting a rhythm for your body to follow, ensuring you stay on track towards your time goal.

## BREAKDOWN OF TRAINING WORKOUTS

### [Cool Down](#)

Cool down after any workout that involves changes in pace or effort levels, such as intervals, tempo runs, threshold runs, hill work, track work, etc. A cool-down should be very easy, run at a 1-2 on the RPE scale, and help bring your body back to baseline regarding breathing and heart rate.

### [Distance Runs](#)

Distance runs, also known as base-building runs, are a crucial part of your training. These runs, performed at a comfortable, conversational pace, help you gradually increase your volume and improve your aerobic base. The rate of perceived exertion should be between a 3-4 on the scale of 1-10.

### [Hill Repeats](#)

Hill repeats are a type of interval workout. First, you must warm up for 3 km or 2 miles. Then, you will run uphill, hard, between a 9-10 RPE, for the amount of time indicated in the specific workout. Then, you will jog back down to your starting point and repeat for the indicated number of times. Cool down for another 3 km or 2 miles.

### [Long Runs](#)

Long runs gradually increase your volume, which is vital in preparing you for race day. Most long runs will be run at an RPE of 3-4 unless otherwise indicated. They are also dress rehearsals for your race, so you should use them to practice race fueling and hydration strategies.

### [Race Pace Run](#)

Race-pace runs are just that: runs where you practice your estimated race pace for either specific intervals or the duration of the workout. You warm up for 3 km or 2 miles and cool down for 3 km or 2 miles before and after each workout.

**For a sub-4 hour marathon, your race pace is 5:27 / km or 8:47 / mile.**

### [Recovery Runs](#)

Recovery Run are slightly easier than distance runs, coming in at a rate of perceived exertion of 2-3. The objective of these runs are to recovery from a harder session, and add easy volume to your week.

### [Rest Day](#)

Rest days are not just a suggestion, they are a necessity. They are the days when you can rest, hydrate, refuel, and relax, without any strenuous activity or exercise. Your body needs this time to adapt and recuperate from your workouts, and to prevent injuries. So, please, respect and prioritize these rest days for better running performance.

### [Shake Out Run](#)

A shake-out run is a very easy jog, usually run the day before a race to "shake out" your legs. It should be a 1-2 on the RPE scale.

## **[Strength Training](#)**

Strength training is not just a beneficial addition to your running training plan, it's a necessity. It plays a crucial role in correcting muscle imbalances, making you a fitter, stronger, and faster runner, and most importantly, it helps you stay injury-free. Aim for two sessions of strength training per week, ideally on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the PM, but whenever you can fit it in best. Incorporate compound exercises such as squats, lunges, glute bridges, calf raises, planks, push-ups, rows or pull-ups, etc.

## **[Strides](#)**

Strides are short accelerations in which you begin easy and increase your effort level to almost top speed, RPE 8-9, and then gradually return to your initial pace. The number of strides and their duration will be indicated in each workout. You may run them at any time throughout the run. The rest of the run should be run at an easy, conversation pace.

## **[Tempo Runs](#)**

Tempo Runs are longer blocks of threshold training. You will run for the indicated km, miles, or time at a sustainable, hard effort, an RPE of 6-7. You will run at a hard pace, but one you could hold for 60 minutes. These runs improve your ability to run faster and harder for longer. Warm up for 3km or 2 miles before each tempo run, and cool down with 3km or 2 miles.

## **[Threshold Intervals](#)**

Threshold intervals are a type of speedwork. You run the threshold intervals at your threshold pace, which, for our purposes, is 5:06/km or 8:17/mile. These workouts improve your speed and ability to sustain harder efforts for longer periods of time. Warm up for 2 km or at least 1 mile before the workout and cool down for 2 km or 1 mile after the workout.

## **[Warm Up](#)**

Warm up before any workout that involves changes in pace or effort levels, such as intervals, race-pace runs, tempo runs, threshold runs, hill work, track work, etc. You never want to jump into speedwork without properly preparing your muscles and body by gradually warming up. A warm-up should be very easy; run at a 1-3 on the RPE scale.

## **TrainingPeaks 4 Hour Marathon Training Plan**

Want to get an interactive version of this plan on the TrainingPeaks app, which allows you to track your own runs against the plan and provides further guidance?

**[Here is the Sub 4 Hour Marathon Training Plan on TrainingPeaks!](#)**

## **CUSTOMIZING THE PLAN**

No two runners are the same, and there's no such thing as a one-size-fits-all plan. That's why I make all my plans easy to customize: use the Google Sheets or Excel version of this plan to move things around to suit your weekly schedule, shorten or extend the plan, and mix up the workouts to suit your ability level.

***In order to edit the file, please download it or make a copy (File>Make a Copy)***

## **MEDICAL DISCLAIMER**

This plan is for informational purposes only: it is not a certified exercise / health / wellness regime. Partake in run training at your own risk, always consult a doctor before starting a new exercise regime, and don't do anything stupid. Now let's get on with the details...

## **THE MARATHON TRAINING MASTERCLASS**

**[Take your training further with my Marathon Training Masterclass. With over 6 hours of exclusive video tutorials and loads of bonus downloads, I've poured everything I've learned about marathon training over the years into this course. Whether it's injury-prevention, nutrition, or some race day strategies and road-tested tips, I've squeezed everything in here.](#)**

**[Check Out The Marathon Training Masterclass!](#)**

## **Questions?**

**[Check out our Marathon Handbook Facebook Group, it's an awesome community of runners sharing their knowledge, frustrations, and wins!](#)**

Unfortunately I can't respond to individual queries these days, but the FB group is probably an even better source of running wisdom!

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