

Your Marathon: Everything you Need to Know

By Marathon Specialist Physiotherapist Lucy Macdonald

Do you worry about getting injured? Do you question if you'll hit your time target? Are you concerned that you will let people down if you can't complete your marathon? Do you know how to prevent injury? Are you ever anxious about fitting in all the training?

This month by month guide by Lucy Macdonald, Specialist Physiotherapist, gives you all the knowledge you need to take control of your training, prevent pain and injury, make your training time efficient, get rid of your fears and give you the confidence to fulfil your potential.

After twenty years of experience enabling thousands of runners like you to accomplish marathons, train optimally and achieve their goals, Lucy Macdonald and her team are here for YOU. Lucy and her team provide online clinics specialising in giving second opinions so if you can't make it into Central London to see them you can still benefit from their expertise. The online consultation includes a written diagnosis and treatment plan focused on your goals, provision of exercises and technique modifications, analysis of your training programme and recommendations for hands on treatment if needed.

Whatever month it is now, make sure you read it from top to bottom. Then you can refer to for a reminder, month by month and use the contents page to find the answers you need to any questions you have.

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Seven months to go

What running shoes should I buy?

- This is the one piece of kit you should invest in. You will need at least two pairs over the course of your marathon training, more if you do a lot of your training off road or on the coast because mud, water and salt all increase the wear on the shoe material.
- Most people need a 'neutral' style running shoe. 'Anti-pronation' trainers or 'stability' trainers are sold far too frequently and can cause more problems than they solve. This is because pronation is normal and when people are told that they have 'overpronation' it is often due to weaknesses further up the leg. If in doubt get in touch with Lucy and her team.
- Decent running shoes do not come cheap but equally the most expensive brand is not necessarily the best. Just chose a running specific shoe from a decent brand, for example Asics, New Balance, Nike, Saucony or Brooks. Try on a variety of brands because they all provide a slightly different fit and the primary requirement for running shoes is comfort.
- To know whether it's time to change your shoes, take your shoe off and hold the front of the shoe in one hand and the heel in the other. Try to bend the shoe – it should bend first over the big toe and afterwards over the arch of the foot, not the other way around. Get in touch with Lucy and her physio team if you are not sure whether it is time to change your shoes.

Is there any truth in 'no pain no gain'?

- Yes and no. The only way that your body will get stronger and fitter is if you push it beyond its normal levels of activity. This causes microtrauma, or damage to the tissues of the body which results in discomfort. The body's healing and repair mechanisms then kick in and not only mend the damaged tissue but make it stronger and more resilient than before.
- However, three things undermine this process:
 - 1) The first is if you push the body too far too quickly then excessive damage is caused resulting in more intensive pain and a reduced ability to train.
 - 2) The second is if you do not give enough time for recovery.
 - 3) The third is that the ingredients required for recovery, which include nutrients and sleep, are not available to the body.

Any one of these things result, at best, in a plateau in strength and fitness or, at worst, a reduction of fitness, progressive weakness, fatigue and repetitive injury.

- So, to avoid a situation where you are suffering pain with no gain, make sure you pace yourself, have a clear recovery programme and build your training programme up in small increments. You can read more about these things later.

What can I do now to motivate myself over the next six months?

Your Marathon: Everything you Need to Know

- Write down your commitment on a paper and stick it up on the wall so you see it every day. Create three or four key positive mantras and say them out loud every day. For example, 'I am going to complete the marathon' 'I am going to achieve my fundraising target' or 'I am going to enjoy my training.'
- Create and reinforce good habits. For example, leave your shoes and running gear out the night before your morning run or by the door so they are there to remind you when you get home, find a space at work where you can do some physio exercises at lunch time, join a running group at the weekend, make a mini gym space at home and set up an app on your phone like map my run.
- Plan the next few months of motivation: set your rewards day by day, week by week, month by month; make yourself a variety of some motivational music mixes; make a list of some entertaining podcasts or audiobooks you would like to listen to; give yourself a list of routes you want to explore as part of your running journey and join social media marathon groups so you can bask in your achievements step by step together. (Just don't ever compare yourself to someone else – there are ALWAYS people stronger and weaker than you, you are not running their marathon, you are running yours.)
- Visualise and imagine the feelings of satisfaction and achievement you will feel each week when you have completed each part of this next week of training, imagine how proud you will feel at the end of each month and imagine what the physical and mental health benefits will feel like.
- Write down your training programme, stick it on the wall and tick off each and everything you do. Include things like 'ate a healthy lunch' 'rested well today' 'did my mindfulness' 'did my sleep routine' to the columns on your chart so you can reinforce these essential parts of your training programme too (more on them later.)

Should I get old injuries checked out now?

- If you have old injuries that do not cause you any pain during or after running, then there is no need to get them checked out.
- Just make sure you build up your training programme in small increments and get in touch with Lucy and her physio team if they do start to niggle. The sooner an injury or pain is assessed the easier it is to treat and the less chance of it getting in the way of achieving your marathon goals.

Six months to go

What are the three most important things about a running programme?

- 1) Be realistic. One of the most common causes of injury is people training inconsistently, sporadically or over-training. This is often because they have set themselves a training programme that is impossible considering the other commitments in their lives or that their target time is unrealistic. Make sure you fit your training programme around your life, allow for flexibility and don't let your ego set an unachievable target time for you!

- 2) Make recovery, rest and sleep part of your programme (more on this below.)
- 3) Focus on quality not quantity. Interval training is more important than distance (more on this below.)

What distance should I be aiming for every week?

- If you focus on distance you are missing a trick. It is far better to focus on shorter higher quality training sessions using intervals rather than on distance.
- You will achieve a greater increase in fitness in a shorter training session by using intervals. It is therefore THE most time efficient way of training.
- This is because the process of taking your heart rate from a low rate to a high rate puts the most strain on the cardiovascular system. If you run for 30 minutes continuously this occurs only once, at the beginning of the run. If you run intervals for 30 minutes this happens numerous times which is far more strenuous. You will run less far but your fitness gains will be much greater.

How should I use intervals?

- Interval training is not suitable for anyone who has heart problems or other medical conditions. Speak to Lucy and her team or contact your GP if you are not sure.
- Most of your runs should be intervals, you only need to aim to do one continuous run a week.
- Make sure you don't sprint or run faster than your normal rate because this will increase your chance of injury.
- There are lots of different ways of interval training, it doesn't matter which one you choose, as long as you are repeatedly dropping your heart rate down and then raising it up again.
- Breathlessness is a good indicator of whether you are achieving this. Make sure you walk for long enough so that your breathing rate recovers to the extent that you can comfortably have a conversation using long sentences without needing to gasp for breath.
- Start with warming up and then repeat about five blocks of three minutes consisting of running two minutes and walking for one. Then you can build up slowly by adding three-minute blocks.
- Remember to include more recovery measures to reflect the additional strain you have put on your body.
- Get in touch with Lucy and her physio team if you would like more details on how to best incorporate intervals into your training programme.

- Rest and recovery should be a fundamental part of your training programme. Without it you will at best plateau in strength and fitness and at worse get weaker, sustain an injury or become ill.
- Make sure you sleep well. Sleeping is when our recovery and repair goes into turbo drive. If you struggle to sleep focus on getting into a regular bedtime routine and avoid screens. If you still can't sleep just lie down with your eyes closed and listen to something soothing, it will still help you to recover.
- Rest should involve resting your mind as well as your body so that you can use your mental energy for staying motivated. Activities like reading, listening to music, practicing mindfulness or meditation or doing gentle yoga or swimming are much better than any kind of screen time for relaxing the mind.
- If you are feeling excessively tired you will get more benefit from resting than going for a run.
- Eating properly is essential to recovery (see below)

What should I be eating?

- Get your calorie input right – too many calories and you will put on fat and too few calories and your body will use your muscle stores to create energy and you will lose strength and increase your risk of injury.
- Avoid processed foods like white breads, cake, biscuits, sweets and ready meals.
- Eat at least five fruit or vegetables a day, the more veggies the merrier, they contain essential cell forming nutrients.
- Eat good fats contained in seeds, some types of oil, nuts and oily fish.
- Protein, found in foods like meat, dairy, eggs, nuts, seeds, beans and pulses, is also important for building and maintaining muscle, especially if you are doing strength training.
- You are unlikely to need protein shakes or other supplements, you can read more about this later.

When do I need to see a running physio or running coach?

- It depends on your objectives and how much of an investment you want to make at this stage. Most people will be fine without seeing a physio or running coach if you build up your running slowly and follow all of the advice in this guide.
- However, there are two situations when it would be valuable to see Lucy and her physio team at this stage:

- 1) If you have a definite time target in mind, then it is a good idea to see a specialist physio or running coach who can carry out a running screening assessment, give you technique advice and provide you a tailored programme based on your individual biomechanics.
- 2) If you have pain when you run then it is important to get in touch with Lucy and her physio team now because the sooner you get it looked at the sooner you reduce the risk of it stopping you from running.

Five months to go

What stretches should I be doing?

- Research shows that static stretching before or during running has no benefit and could increase injury risk so only do them at the end of your run.
- Here are the top five stretches you should do after you run, you can watch them for free at www.octopusclinic.com, just put the number into the search tool at the top:
 - 1) Back: stretch your upper back with video 67 and your low back with video 59
 - 2) Hips: stretch your hips with video 58
 - 3) Quadriceps: stretch the front of your thighs with video 54
 - 4) Hamstrings: stretch with back of your thighs with video 55
 - 5) Calf muscles: stretch your calf muscles with video 56

What other exercises should I be doing?

- Use the free online exercise videos you can find in the videos section of the website www.octopusclinic.com. Or simply put the number of the suggested exercises below into the search tool at the top of the website and off you go.
- See the section above for the top five stretches.
- Strength training can help to prevent injury and improve performance. The most important muscle groups to work are:
 - 1) Quadriceps: strengthen the muscles at the front of your thighs doing split squats or lunges – video 23
 - 2) Gluteals: strengthen your hip stability muscles using the wall-ball exercise - videos 37-39
 - 3) Calves: strengthen these muscles using heel drops and raises – video 36
 - 4) Core: learn how to use your pelvic floor and deep abdominals – videos 7-11 and use the correct planking exercise technique – video 16
- Proprioception is the body's positional sense and important way of reducing your risk of injury - videos 70-72 show you how.
- Running technique and alignment exercises are also great to reduce risk of injury – check out video 25 as a starting point but this is where a session with a running specialist physio can be very helpful. Get in touch with Lucy and her team to find out more.

Do I need to warm up?

- Although it is important not to do static stretching before running, warming up can reduce the risk of injury.
- Start with a brisk walk and then build up to your normal pace. The colder it is and the longer you have been immobile before you start your run (for example if you are running first thing in the morning) the longer you need to warm up but about 5-10 minutes is a good guide.

Should I be taking protein or other supplements?

- It is best to get all your protein, calories, vitamins and minerals from food.
- You can overdose on certain vitamins and minerals which can be at best unpleasant and at worst dangerous. Nutrients are more easily absorbed in the form of food and your digestive system benefits from you eating food more than it does taking tablets or supplements.
- It is also difficult to find good quality protein and vitamin supplements that do not contain unpleasant synthetic ingredients and most of them make false or overexaggerated claims. It is a very unregulated market.
- However, if you have carefully looked at the ingredient list and understand what is in the supplements then they can have their place at times when you have limited access to food. This is how professional sports people and elite athletes do it. They get most of their fuel from food and occasionally top it up with supplements.
- If you are unsure about what supplements might work for you go and see your GP, a dietician or nutritionist (although the latter is not a protected title so make sure they are suitably qualified.)

How does stress and sleep affect my risk of injury and illness.

- If you don't sleep or rest enough your immune system is not able to recover, and you therefore predispose yourself to injury and illness.
- Stress also hammers the immune system so stress management needs to be part of your marathon training plan.
- Get in touch with Lucy and her team if you are stressed, feel fatigued or are struggling to sleep properly.

Do back supports, knee braces, 'skins' or other gadgets work?

- Back supports can be great if you are wearing them for a couple of days during a flare up but no longer than this because they can result in your back muscles becoming weaker and therefore result in longer term problems. If you have back pain during or after running, make sure you get booked in with Lucy and her physio team and then you don't have to worry about it getting worse.

- ‘Skins’ and other similar brands that provide very tightly fitted items of clothing, claim to benefit circulation and improve performance and recovery. However, there is no conclusive independent medical research to support these claims. A low level of discomfort in the muscles after intensive training or strength work is normal (you can read more about this above) but if it is interrupting your ability to train, is localised to particular body parts or does not resolve before your next training session then it is important to review your training and have an assessment with Lucy and her physio team.
- Knee braces do not provide structural support unless you buy the super expensive carbon fibre ones that are generally too bulky for running. However, neoprene knee supports can provide both sensory and warming benefits to the knee that can reduce pain. The metal hinges will not give any additional benefit so choose something that fits well and is super comfortable. There is no need to spend much money, the cheaper ones can be just as effective as the more expensive ones. If you have knee pain, the sooner you get it checked out the less likely it is to interrupt your marathon training so book in with Lucy and her physio team now.

How do I know if I am seeing a decent Physiotherapist, Osteopath or Chiropractor?

- All professions have those that excel at what they do and those that do not. Medical and health professional are no different. Therefore, it is important to equip yourself with the knowledge to be able to discern the difference. An excellent Physiotherapist, Chiropractor, Osteopath or other similar therapist will fulfil the following criteria:
 - 1) You never have more than three appointments without you showing SUSTAINED and SIGNIFICANT improvement.
 - 2) They modify your activity levels instead of telling you to rest. Complete rest is very rarely beneficial (you can read more about this later.)
 - 3) They listen to exactly how your symptoms are affecting your life and use a scale to give a number to every activity that is affected (not just a 0 -10 pain scale.) This helps with diagnosis, directs treatment and gives a baseline so you both know to what extent you are improving.
 - 4) When they say what is causing your symptoms it makes complete sense.
 - 5) They give you the ideal treatment plan with clear time frames including number of sessions and frequency of visits and tell you why you need to see them for those sessions. Then they ask you if this is realistic for you time and budget wise, and together you make compromises.
 - 6) They observe how you do the movements or components of the movements that cause your pain, not just running. They then explain how to adjust these activities e.g. the way you walk, go up and down stairs, sit at work, and of course run. These small alterations in your technique can often result in an immediate reduction or cessation of pain when running.
 - 7) Hands-on techniques are only one component of the treatment and when they do them you feel comfortable with why they are doing them and confident you can ask them to stop at any time.

- 8) You are given exercises that make total logical sense and can be easily related to running and your other painful or difficult activities. Most exercises should be standing up (ideally on one leg.) Lying down exercises have their place, but you should have a clear understanding of how they relate to running.
 - 9) They tell you when they don't know the answer and refer you to someone who does. If they say they want you to have a second opinion or ask one of their peers to join a session with you then you know you are in safe hands.
 - 10) They never tell you that you need ongoing treatment.
- If you have doubts about your treatment, the first thing to do is to discuss them with your health professional, then get in touch with Lucy and her physio team.

Four months to go

How can resting my injury cause more harm than good?

- Complete rest is rarely advisable. The only case in which complete rest is essential is in the presence of bony damage like a fracture, or if you are ill. If you don't rest when you are unwell you can end up with life-threatening illnesses like pericarditis.
- Most injuries respond better to modifying the activity not avoiding it completely. There are many ways that this can be achieved for example by making changes to your running technique or altering the way you are training.
- Resting will feel good in the short term but long term it can:
 - 1) Reduce the resilience of the tendons – tendons need to be loaded to recover. If you have a tendinopathy, previously known as tendinitis, resting it is likely to make it worse long term
 - 2) Cause muscle wasting and weakness, therefore increasing the risk of re-injury
 - 3) Limit circulation to the joints and nerves
 - 4) Cause a deterioration in cardiovascular fitness
 - 5) Result in reduced performance
 - 6) Increase the chance of pain pathways becoming established
 - 7) Drive you mad! Seriously though, rest can be really demotivating
- If your physio or other health professional is advising rest, then it is worth getting a second opinion from Lucy and her physio team (you can read more about second opinions below.)

How do I know if I am over-training?

- Over-training is a major reason people get injured. It puts undue strain on your heart and lungs and causes your immune system not to work properly. This opens you up to coughs, colds, infections and other more serious diseases. The high stress levels can also affect hormones and mood and have a negative impact on psychological function including anxiety and/or depression.
- Watch out for the early warning signs of over-training which include one, or combination of any number of the following: feeling constantly tired, fatiguing quickly, plateauing in training

or strengthening, constant aches and pains, repetitive injuries, difficulty sleeping and getting multiple minor illnesses or infections.

- If you think you might be overtraining:
 - 1) Speak to Lucy and her physio team who can help you prioritise your running programme.
 - 2) Make your training sessions small but perfectly formed. Short stints of high resistance training (30 mins to cover most muscle groups) every third day is best for building muscle. Interval training is more effective than long plods when it comes to cardiovascular training.
 - 3) Include rest and sleep in your training programme and elevate them above the level of importance you place on actual training sessions.
 - 4) Get your nutrition right.
 - 5) Don't drink alcohol or eat very sugary or highly refined foods and don't smoke.
 - 6) If you are feeling stressed, anxious or angry make sure you stick to what you planned on doing to avoid letting your emotions push you too far. Also try not to compare yourself to other people – set your own goals and don't go beyond them.

Should I be doing Pilates, Yoga, swimming or other types of exercise?

- It is good include other forms of exercise in your training programme to enhance recovery both physically and mentally.
- Pilates, Yoga, swimming, gentle martial arts like Chi Kung or Tai Chi or other non-impact exercises are ideal.
- If you choose something you find enjoyable and relaxing, you are more likely to have the mental strength to stay motivated and stick to your training programme.
- Gentle exercise is also better than complete rest for physical recovery too because by stimulating circulation you are improving the blood flow to the recovering muscles and joints.

Should I use ice or heat if I am injured or in pain?

- If you are injured ice or heat can help you to recover although the research evidence on the subject is not conclusive.
- The best thing to do is to follow two simple rules:
 - 1) If it is hot cool it down and if it is stiff warm it up
 - 2) Use whichever you think instinctively would feel good
- There are various ways of applying cold or heat – using all sorts of gadgets you can buy in the chemist or simply a bag of peas or a hot bath. They all do the same thing – they reduce or increase the surface temperature of your skin and the structures immediately below them. This affects circulation and therefore inflammation. They also provide sensory input which can reduce pain.

- Make sure you don't get carried away or fall asleep with a cold or hot pack in place or you will get burnt. Wrap whatever you are using in cloth and make sure you check the skin regularly.
- If you have swelling or pain in a specific body area, then it is a sign that you have sustained an injury and need to get it checked out as soon as possible. Get in touch with Lucy and her physio team now.

What injuries can I run through and which ones should I get checked out?

- If you experience pain while you are running it is OK to continue to run only if the following apply:
 - 1) The pain does not get worse as you continue to run.
 - 2) The pain stays below 3/10 in severity on a scale where 10 is the worst pain you could imagine and 0 is nothing.
 - 3) The pain resolves fully within 2-3 hours of stopping running and does not return.
 - 4) You don't feel the pain doing any other day to day activities or at night.
 - 5) There are no other symptoms like swelling, redness, pins and needles, fatigue or weakness.
- Get in touch with Lucy and her physio team now for advice and reassurance.

When should I get a second opinion from another physiotherapist?

- If any of the following apply to you then it is worth getting a second opinion:
 - 1) They have told you that you can't run the marathon. (Unless you have been diagnosed with a bone fracture, in which case you really can't.)
 - 2) You have been told to rest and/or they don't give you any indication of when you can return to running.
 - 3) They are just doing hands on treatment with you.
 - 4) The exercises they have given you are all lying down.
 - 5) You are not recovering as you would like, and/or you have had three sessions with no sustained significant improvement.
 - 6) They have not gone through your training programme step by step and made improvements.
- Get in touch with Lucy and her physio team because you might be pleasantly surprised with what they can do for you.

Three months to go

Should I worry about clicking joints?

- If clicking joints are not painful then no. Research has shown that clicking joints, in the absence of pain, are not a symptom of current damage and are also not an indicator for future damage. In other words, clicking joints do not mean you have more chance of arthritis or any other joint pain in future.

- If you would like to know more about the different causes of clicking joint then please go to www.octopusclinic.com and read Lucy's article called 'Click, clunk, grind! What does it mean when joints talk?'

Could stretching be making my pain or injury worse, even if it feels good?

- Static stretching before or during exercise not only has no benefits but it could also increase your chance of injury. This is because stretching reduces the reaction time of muscles and this delay in responding to an obstacle could lead to injury.
- If you have pain in your tendons you should not passively stretch them because research shows that this can make them worse long term. So, calf stretches are not appropriate for Achilles tendinopathy (previously called a tendinitis) and quads stretches are not good for knee tendon pain, even if they feel good in the short term.
- Get in touch with Lucy and her physio team if you are not sure if you should be doing the stretches you have been given.

I am behind schedule in my training, what should I do?

- Something will get in the way of your training at some point. Unless you are a professional athlete you are likely to have a job and other responsibilities in your life, like family or other dependents. You are also human, and therefore your motivation might wane for periods of time or you might get ill and need to rest.
- When you return to running, the worst thing you could do is go straight back to where you had planned to be had you not taken any time off.
- If you have been off for a week or less, then go back to where you left off but stay within your comfort zone for the first 2-3 runs before building up again. If you have been off for longer than this, you will have lost significant fitness, so you will have to go back a few weeks.
- This will probably mean that you will not reach the same distance that you had hoped to before the marathon and this is something that the sooner you accept the sooner you can continue to enjoy your marathon journey. You will still run the marathon, you may even still make the time you wanted.
- If you are injured, are in pain, need reassurance on whether you are going to be able to complete the marathon or want to know if your target time is achievable, then get in touch with Lucy and her physio team.

When should I go back to running after being injured?

- Lucy and her physio team will go out of their way not to stop you running, they will probably just modify how you are doing it. If they absolutely must stop you then they will advise you on how to replace your running training with other forms of exercise that reflect the cardiovascular intensity and physical demands of running.
- It is often possible to return to running or continue running even if you are not completely pain free in all other aspects of your life. For example, you might have pain going up and down stairs but, with the right technique and modifications, it might be safe to return to running.
- When returning to running the best way of doing it is using intervals. These should be done at your normal comfortable pace, not slower or faster. Your physio should advise you what intervals would be best for you and how to build them up.
- Get in touch with Lucy and her physio team if you would like advice on whether you should be taking a break from running, how you can modify your running so that you can continue to some extent and/or if you have had a break what the best way would be for you to get back to it. The sooner you can get back to running the better so don't leave it.

When should I see a Physiotherapist, GP, massage therapist, Osteopath, Chiropractor, sports therapist or acupuncturist?

- The best thing to do is to read someone's individual biography or contact Lucy and her team for a recommendation because they work with a network of highly reputable medical and health professionals. The following is designed to guide you in the right direction but please note that these are generalisations and do not apply to all individuals.
- If you are injured or want short and long-term pain relief, see a Physiotherapist. A private Physiotherapist can also refer you to an Orthopaedic Consultant or Sports Doctor for scans, injections or surgery. Seek a second opinion from Lucy and her team if you do not have sustained improvement within three sessions.
- If you have back pain, neck pain or pelvic pain and want hands-on treatment, particularly anywhere on your spine or pelvis see an Osteopath. A private Osteopath should be able to refer you to an Orthopaedic Consultant or Sports Doctor for scans, injections or surgery. See a second opinion if you do not have sustained improvement within three sessions.
- For any other symptoms including fatigue, heart and breathing problems, are struggling to cope or want to see an NHS physio, Orthopaedic Consultant or other kind of specialist on the NHS, see your GP.
- If you want ongoing alternative treatment of your symptoms see a Chiropractor or an Acupuncturist. Seek a second opinion if you do not have significant and sustained improvement within three sessions.

- If you want to relieve generalised muscle soreness, improve recovery and performance see a sports therapist or sports massage therapist. See a Physiotherapist if you have a specific area of pain or discomfort.

Two months to go

What should I eat and drink on long runs?

- Make sure you are hydrated and have eaten well for the twenty-four hours before a long run because this will help your performance and reduce injury risk. Drinking plenty of water and having a little bit of extra salt in your diet can be a good idea but be careful with too much extra salt, particularly if you have high blood pressure, kidney problems, diabetes or any other medical conditions. Ask your GP if you are not sure.
- If you don't provide your body with adequate calories and hydration on a long run, you will start to run slower and feel tired and sluggish. Eventually your body will force you to stop by feeling dizzy or even fainting which can be dangerous. However, drinking too much water can cause the brain to swell and can be fatal so make sure you don't overdo it.
- What you need to eat and drink will be different to the next person. It will be affected by the temperature and how intensely you are training. It is therefore essential that you listen to your body and learn what you as an individual need.
- There are different ways to get your fuel. Some people like to have small snacks like sandwiches, fruit, biscuits or sweets to nibble on along the way. Others prefer to go for energy bars, drinks or gels but these can cause stomach upsets so make sure you try them out well before the marathon.
- Your choice of hydration will depend on the method that you take in your calories. If you are eating food containing salt or drinking energy drinks containing electrolytes, then these will probably be enough. However, if you are sweating a huge amount then you may need to supplement with specific electrolyte drinks. Make sure you learn what your body needs in advance of the marathon.

Can a physio help my injury at this stage of the game?

- Yes, even less than two months before the marathon an experienced running physio can do a lot to make sure you get to that start line and complete your marathon.
- This may include making changes to your training schedule, modifying the way you are running, advising you to have massage or acupuncture, giving you exercises and advising on other things like nutrition and recovery.
- Get in touch with Lucy and her physio team to find out how they can help you or for a second opinion.

I have done no-where near 26 miles how am I going to manage it on the day?

- Try not to worry, you don't need to run anywhere near 26 miles before you run the marathon.
- The longer the distance you run in training the more likely you are to get injured so don't push the distance too hard.
- Remember you are better off doing lots of interval training rather than focussing on long runs. Intervals will get you fitter quicker and with less risk of injury.
- A lot of people feel they need the psychological reassurance of running a big distance before the marathon. However, once you get to marathon day and feel the support and positive buzz all around you, you'll have all the psychological motivation you need.

What is carb loading?

- Carb loading refers to increasing your carbohydrate intake the day or evening before an endurance event like a marathon by eating a large bowl of pasta, for example. It used to be thought to help the build up of energy stores in the muscles ready for the next day.
- However, if you eat a lot more carbohydrate than your body is used to the day before a marathon you can end up feeling heavy, congested and bloated on the day.
- It is therefore advisable to make sure you are eating a steady amount of carbohydrates, found in foods like pasta, potatoes, bread and rice for the days and weeks before the marathon so that there is no need for you to increase your intake the day before.

One month to go

Should I run the marathon if I am injured?

- The most important thing is for you to understand the short, and long-term risks of running on your injury.
- It might be that there are long-term risks that you are not aware exist. For example, if you run on some types of stress fractures there is a chance of hospitalisation and potentially fatal illness due to the risk of travelling blood clots, called embolisms. Or if you run on some forms of cartilage damage it could shorten the lifespan of your joints and therefore reduce some of the sports or activities you might otherwise be able to do later in your life.

- However, yours might be the sort of injury that is just going to cause you pain but, if you can bear to run through it, won't give you any long-term damage.
- In order to understand the risks, get in touch with Lucy and her physio team and you can then make an informed decision.

Do I have to taper?

- Tapering is where you reduce the amount of training you are doing weeks before the marathon. If you want to give your body the best chance of achieving its optimal potential running the marathon as well as reducing the risk of injury, then yes, you do have to taper.
- Your training should peak no later than two weeks before the marathon and you should do very small amounts of low-level running, or rest completely, the week before the marathon.
- If you are not sure how or when to taper get in touch with Lucy and her physio team.

What physio or medical input can help me at this stage?

- The most important thing at this stage is to get a diagnosis from an experienced running physio to establish the risks of completing your marathon. You may be pleasantly reassured by what they have to say and what can be done even at this late stage so please get in touch with Lucy and her team now.
- They will also advise you on what hands-on treatment, taping, massage, foam-rolling and exercises are useful for you to do, even if it is literally a few days or hours before kick-off but the sooner you get in touch the better.

Can I take painkillers or anti-inflammatories and run the marathon?

- There are risks of severe, potentially fatal, kidney problems if you take anti-inflammatories when your body temperature is raised as it is when running a marathon. So as tempting as it may be, simply do not take them.
- If you want to take paracetamol or any other medications whilst running your marathon then go and see a qualified Pharmacist, GP or Sports Doctor who can run through the risks with you.

Can you give me any last-minute tips for completing the marathon?

- Focus on breathing out slowly, not breathing in. Breathing in is a reflex, breathing out is not. If you focus on emptying your lungs you will enable a maximum reflex breath in, if you focus on breathing in to fill your lungs you could hyperventilate.
- Start steady but not too slow.

- Don't stop. Keep going even if it is a slow walk. The moment you stop, the circulation in your muscles and joints reduces and you can seize up and find it hard to start again. The exception to this is if cramping literally forces you to stop. The best thing for cramp is to stay weight bearing as much as you can.
- Don't static stretch before or during the marathon, no matter how tempting it is.
- Listen to the crowds, imagine every one of them is there supporting you personally. Absorb all that wonderful positive energy, let it fuel you.
- Accept that your muscles will be uncomfortable and that you will feel tired, they are signs that you are almost there.
- Lap up the camaraderie of the day. Motivate flagging runners when you have the energy and allow yourself to be motivated by others when you are flagging.
- Enjoy the spectacle and all the variation that the route brings – architecture, people, history, sights, sounds and even smells!
- Don't let the weather let you down, there are advantages of any kind of weather, try to embrace it.
- Remember you have done the hard-work in training, and although it won't be easy you will complete it and you will enjoy it. We will be cheering you on.

Get in touch

- Get in touch with Lucy Macdonald and her team if you have any concerns or questions, don't forget that they here for you whatever stage you are at in your marathon training.
- Lucy and her team provide **online clinics** specialising in giving second opinions and providing affordable physio packages so if you can't make it into Central London to see them you can still benefit from their expertise.
- The online consultation includes a written diagnosis and treatment plan focused on your goals, video exercises, technique modifications and recommendations for hands on treatment if needed.
- She is covered by all **medical insurance companies** and there are heavily discounted packages if you are self-paying.
- Charity marathon runners receive a **discount** so make sure you say who you are running for when you get in touch.
- Call **07769653715** or email lucymacdonaldphysio@hotmail.co.uk.

A few testimonials to inspire you

'I was told that I should never run again due to knee pain. I sought a second opinion and the consultant said this was nonsense and referred me to Lucy who he described as the best bio-mechanical physio he had ever come across. Within 10 minutes Lucy noticed something that all the physios and chiropractors I had seen previously had all missed. Lucy gave me simple but effective exercises and within a few sessions I was running again. I have been running pain free for over 6 months and it is all down to her skill and expertise.' Justine Trumper

'The first to take me seriously after seeing countless people. Having had knee problems for years now and seen countless people about it, Lucy has been the first to really take me seriously and tailor a training programme to my needs. I'm now feeling fitter than I have done in a long time.' Josh Higgins

'Lucy is an extremely experienced and talented physiotherapist. The vast majority of physios do not have her capabilities when it comes to healing complex patients back to full recovery. Lucy is one of the few physios with the required skills to see very complex cases who need really specialist physio input. Often these patients present with a mixed picture which, will typically go on to make a full recovery in Lucy's hands, without the need for surgery or 'round the houses' referrals to other therapists. Every single patient I have sent to Lucy has been made better by her and all have nothing but the highest praise for her skills.' Leading Sports Consultant Doctor

'I have known Lucy and her clinic for over seven years and I am happy to say that she is one of the most outstanding musculoskeletal physiotherapists in London.' Leading Orthopaedic Consultant

'I injured my knee while training for the London marathon, 4 weeks before the big day. I assumed that I would have to drop out but a series of intensive sessions ensured that I ran the marathon without any problems. She got to the root of the problem quickly, applied expert treatment and gave fantastic advice. On top of this, her approach is bright, efficient and cheerful.' Rob Allen

'Cannot recommend enough. I was struggling with knee problems in training for a marathon, and was totally overwhelmed and confused about what to do and who to see. Lucy has been absolutely incredible, sorting out my knee INCREDIBLY EFFECTIVELY and QUICKLY but also reassuring and calming me - she understands that people running a marathon for charity have often gone through something, and that training is an emotional challenge as well as a physical one. She has been worth every penny and I urge you to go visit the clinic if you're struggling with an injury!' Alice James

If you would like more inspiration, check out the over 130 five star google reviews you can find if you google 'Octopus Clinic' or get in touch with Lucy and her team now lucymacdonaldphysio@hotmail.co.uk or call 07769653715.