

Plus Ultra 18-Week Marathon Training Plan

Your path to your first marathon

This plan is intentionally straightforward. It is made for anyone who prefers a self-guided approach and wants a clear path without feeling overwhelmed. It will not tell you exactly what route to take or how fast to run every mile. Instead, it provides structure while leaving room for your own experience to shape the journey.

A marathon is a significant step beyond the distances that brought you here, but you already have a foundation to build from. The challenge now is learning to spend more time on your feet, manage fatigue and gradually prepare your body and mind for 26.2 miles. Terrain, weather and fitness vary from person to person, so your job is to listen to your body and make thoughtful adjustments as you go. This framework is designed to help you stay consistent, build endurance, grow your confidence and keep moving toward your first marathon finish line.

If you ever decide you want more support, my coach offers one-on-one guidance and can help you build a plan that fits your specific goals. Reach out at hello@goplusultra.run if you want a program tailored to your training, fitness level and race. You are also welcome to join the Plus Ultra community on Reddit at r/PlusUltraLife where runners share questions, wins and lessons from the trail.

What Changes When You Train for a Marathon?

A marathon asks you to think about running differently.

Not because 26.2 miles is impossible.

Because you cannot rush your way there.

You learn patience.

You learn to respect recovery.

You learn how to keep moving when the miles begin to add up.

And you discover that confidence comes from weeks of showing up, not one perfect run.

Most people are capable of more than they realize. The challenge is rarely talent. More often, it is having the patience to discover what is already there.

Every mile teaches you something.



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- **Effort scale:** Easy = conversational pace, you could speak in full sentences. Steady = focused but sustainable; breathing is heavier but controlled.
- **Terrain:** Use trails when possible, focusing on soft surfaces and natural terrain.
- **Hill sessions:** If your race includes elevation gain, complete the hill workouts as written. If your race is flat, replace these sessions with steady effort or light speed work. If you live in a flat area, you can also substitute with box step ups, a stair machine or an incline treadmill.
- **Rest:** Take at least two full rest days each week.
- **Fuel and hydration:** Practice your race day nutrition and fluids during longer training runs. Use these runs to learn what works for you before race day.
- **Deload weeks:** Every fourth week reduces training volume, giving your body time to recover and absorb the work you've already done.

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Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Cycle
1.	Rest	Run 4 mi easy	Cross train	Run 3 mi easy	Rest	Run 8 mi	Optional stretch	Foundation
2.	Rest	Run 4 mi easy	Box step ups (2×10 / leg)	Run 3 mi easy	Rest	Run 9 mi	Walk or light hike	Foundation
3.	Rest	Run 5 mi easy	Hill session, 5×30 sec climbs	Run 4 mi easy	Rest	Run 10 mi	Mobility or foam roll	Foundation
4.	Rest	Run 3 mi easy	Cross train	Run 3 mi easy	Rest	Run 7 mi	Optional walk	Deload
5.	Rest	Run 5 mi easy	Hill or incline walk, 20 min	Run 4 mi easy	Rest	Run 11 mi	Light stretch	Build
6.	Rest	Run 5 mi easy	Cross train, 30 min	Run 4 mi steady	Rest	Run 12 mi	Yoga or rest	Build
7.	Rest	Run 6 mi easy	Hill session, 5×30 sec climbs	Run 4 mi easy	Rest	Run 13 mi	Optional walk	Build
8.	Rest	Run 4 mi easy	Cross train	Run 3 mi easy	Rest	Run 9 mi	Light mobility	Deload
9.	Rest	Run 6 mi easy	Cross train or rest	Run 4 mi easy	Rest	Run 14 mi	Light mobility	Endurance
10.	Rest	Run 6 mi easy	Hill session, 5×30 sec climbs	Run 5 mi steady	Rest	Run 15 mi	Optional walk	Endurance
11.	Rest	Run 7 mi easy	Cross train, 30 min	Run 5 mi easy	Rest	Run 16 mi	Yoga or rest	Endurance
12.	Rest	Run 5 mi easy	Cross train or rest	Run 4 mi easy	Rest	Run 11 mi	Light mobility	Deload
13.	Rest	Run 7 mi easy	Hill or incline walk, 20 min	Run 5 mi easy	Rest	Run 17 mi	Optional walk	Peak
14.	Rest	Run 7 mi easy	Cross train, 30 min	Run 5 mi steady	Rest	Run 18 mi	Light stretch	Peak
15.	Rest	Run 8 mi easy	Hill session, 5×30 sec climbs	Run 5 mi easy	Rest	Run 20 mi	Rest or light mobility	Peak
16.	Rest	Run 5 mi easy	Cross train or rest	Run 4 mi easy	Rest	Run 12 mi	Rest	Deload
17.	Rest	Run 4 mi easy	Cross train or rest	Run 3 mi easy	Rest	Run 8 mi	Stretch and visualize race	Taper
18.	Rest	Run 2 mi easy	Rest	Run 1–2 mi easy jog	Rest	Race Day	Celebrate and reflect	Race Week

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Marathon Gear Essentials

The right gear will not make or break your marathon, but a few reliable pieces can make the miles more comfortable. These are the items I have personally used and continue to trust. They are not requirements. They are simply tools that helped me as my runs grew longer.

Everyone develops their own preferences over time. Start with what you already have, learn what works for you and make changes when your training gives you a reason to.

Every item here is something I have personally tested. If you choose to buy through the affiliate links, it supports Plus Ultra at no extra cost to you.

Since brands release new models often, some links may take you to the latest version that differs from what I originally used. The heart of the recommendation remains steady, a tool meant to keep your progress simple and clear.

The Core Three

1. Moisture-wicking socks

In my early days, I used Injinji toe socks paired with Mudgear compression socks. They were recommended for obstacle races and they kept my feet comfortable while reducing friction on long, wet courses. This combo is still my go-to because trails can be unpredictable and wet feet happen.

Injinji toe socks

Mudgear compression socks

2. Anti-chafe balm

You learn quickly how essential this is. I learned the hard way when I was in the shower after a long run, yikes! :) I started with Body Glide because it was easy to find and worked well. I eventually switched to Squirrel's Nut Butter because the natural ingredients felt gentler on my skin and it lasted longer. Both work well; preference guided the change.

Body Glide

Squirrel's Nut Butter

3. Basic GPS watch

When I first began, I bought a used Polar M400 from eBay so I could track my runs without carrying my phone and getting it soaked in sweat. It worked well and gave me the basics I needed. The M400 is older now and usually only found on resale sites, but any simple GPS watch can fill the same role.

What Became Helpful As My Runs Grew Longer

Hydration vest with soft flasks

As my runs got longer, carrying water and nutrition became more important. I use a USWE vest with two 500 ml soft flasks. It stays secure, carries enough water and remains comfortable on long days. It also has room for nutrition and personal items, which makes it especially useful as marathon training runs begin to stretch farther.

You may not need one right away. But as your long runs grow, having water and fuel with you can make those miles simpler and give you a chance to practice the same nutrition and hydration routine you plan to use on race day.

Match your vest size to where you see your running going. A 2L to 5L vest should provide plenty of room for marathon training, but if you already know longer adventures are in your future, consider a 7L to 10L vest. I wish I had thought about this when I started. I ended up buying two different vests and could have saved some money by planning ahead.

USWE hydration vest
USWE hydration bladder

Sun hat

The Louisiana sun can be brutal on pasty skin. I don't score any cool points, but it gets the job done. :)

The North Face sun hat

Take the Trail With You

Sometimes the miles leave you with more than tired legs.

The Plus Ultra Trail Companion is a quiet place to talk through what challenged you, what surprised you and what you want to carry forward.

Start Reflecting →