

Don't rush the marathon



As the racing season approaches there are sometimes grand ideas of finishing a marathon, but don't jump into big, bold plans without first making sure you're ready for what you may be getting into. Running a marathon, although an appealing thought, is generally not a fall project. It should be a long term goal, and there are plenty of alternative races that offer more rewarding outcomes if you haven't prepared enough for 42K.

"Don't be in a rush," says Athletics Canada's road running coordinator, John Lofranco. "A marathon is something where you want to enjoy the experience. The better prepared you are the more you're going to enjoy it.

"I would say, don't think about 'What's the 12- or 16-week plan I need?' Really, you need a few years of running experience to tackle a marathon."

Thinking about a **5K or 10K race**, something which can reasonably be tackled in a shorter time frame, will often be more enjoyable and doable for someone without very much running experience. Don't feel like the marathon has to be the immediate goal. Completing a 10K in a time you're proud of and can do without injury is, for a lot of

people, something they will have more fun doing, even if it may not at first seem to have the lustre of a marathon.

Lofranco suggests setting realistic checkpoints, which will give you a base to build off of while you progress.

“My informal checkpoints would be, if you can run a 5K in 30 minutes, then try and do a 10K. Then, when you can get the 10K down under 60 minutes, try and do a half-marathon. When you get your half-marathon down under two hours, then train for a marathon. Those aren’t particularly demanding times and you could probably, depending on your level of general fitness, knock those off.[...] If you’ve done nothing in the year before and you go for a 12-week plan, it’s going to be difficult. But if you’ve been running regularly for a year or two, then that training counts. It’s not just an equation of 12 weeks.”

Of course, the allure of a fall marathon can still grab some, and if you’re set on running 42K, make sure you do it safely. You’re doing this for fun and ending the season injured, or not getting to finish because of one, is not fun. Make sure you follow a healthy plan that will adequately prepare you for the undertaking where you can safely complete the race but not injure yourself beforehand. This can be a delicate balance.

“Assuming someone says they’re going to do it, the main thing is to try and do lots of easy runs,” suggest Lofranco, who is also a coach in Montreal. “Your goal is probably just to finish and, if all you want to do is finish, you need to extend your ability to run for a certain amount of time.”

If you’re thinking about a fall race and don’t have much running experience, don’t feel like you need to rush the marathon. You will naturally progress to the point where goals become manageable if you take a longer term approach, properly building towards them.