

So You Want to Walk the Harrisburg Marathon....



If you have walked a marathon before, you will find the Harrisburg Marathon to be an attractive course, well-supported, and varied in terrain. Walkers should expect to support their own hydration needs until about mile 7 and their food needs until mile 13. Walkers begin two hours earlier than runners (6 am), allowing for a time limit of seven hours and forty-five minutes (7:45).

If you are new to marathon walking, welcome!

The rest of this page is really for new marathon walkers. Hopefully, you are reading this in April, May, or June – that gives you plenty of time to get ready for your 26.2 mile challenge. While this page cannot be an exhaustive guide to marathon walking, we would like to share a few tips with you.

- Make time for your training. You are undertaking a commitment that will last multiple months. You have to allot enough time for your long walk sessions. If your schedule calls for a four-hour walk, four one-hour walks are better than nothing, but they are not an adequate substitute.
- Get yourself a decent pair of running shoes. (\$60 to \$80 range or so) Running shoes are lighter, more flexible, and more breathable than walking shoes – ingredients that can lead to happier feet over the long miles. Break in new shoes with a few shorter (less than 6 mile) walks before you use them for a long walk. Try to have at least 30 to 50 miles on the shoes that you plan to wear on marathon day.
- It should go without saying, but fit and comfort are much more important than fashion in your shoes. Go to a store that knows running, and can put you in an appropriate pair of shoes. (i.e. Inside Track, Dutrey's, etc.)
- Consider a second pair of shoes so that you can wear them on alternate days, so that you can have a pair already broken in when the other shoes are shot, and/or so that you can train again the day after a soaking rain. (Don't forget about training in the rain – the marathon is a rain-or-shine event!) If your shoes get wet, remove the insoles, stuff the shoes with paper to absorb water, and put them where they can get good air circulation (like near a vent). If you use heat to dry your shoes, it can weaken the glue that holds on the soles.
- While you are out shopping, add a reflective vest or armband to your purchases. Safety first!

- Look at some of the choices in wicking clothing – CoolMax or its various incarnations (such as Reebok PlayDry). But don't go overboard! You'll probably be plenty comfortable in cotton shirts and socks for your shorter walks, but may want the technical fabrics for your longest walk of the week.
- Ladies – the most important piece of workout clothing you will buy is your sports bra.
- Check a bookstore or your library for a good book on the subject of marathoning. Personal recommendations are *Marathoning for Mortals* (Bingham and Hadfield) and *The Complete Guide to Marathon Walking* (McGovern).
- Put that pedometer back on the shelf! The best ones are only accurate within 10% anyway.
- Choose a training program from a book or the internet. Map out a few different locations to walk. Determine the mileage by bicycle odometer (best), car odometer (okay), mile markers (good where available). Also try favoriterun.com or Google Earth. Mix up your terrain – if you only train on a track or treadmill, you'll be unhappy when you meet the hills of Wildwood.
- Practice carrying what you need while you walk. Keys, ID, tissues, drink, food, etc. Try using sports drinks to replenish electrolytes lost in sweat. CytoMax is the sports drink sponsor of the marathon – you may want to try it because it will be the sports drink available on course. You will also need to consume some kind of food to keep up your energy over long miles; whether you use carbohydrate gels, energy bars, granola, dried fruit, etc. is up to you. You will burn approximately 100 calories per mile. If you do not put some carbohydrates in your system along the way, you will “hit the wall” when your muscles run out of glycogen. Develop a regimen for food and drink, i.e. half a bar every 5 miles, and alternating water and sports drink every 30 minutes.
- Ice is your achy joints' best friend after long walks. Tylenol or other acetaminophen products are a better choice than NSAIDs, which can be slightly diuretic.
- Find a friend or a group to join you on your walks. The miles will go much faster. Take your dog along – he or she will appreciate the exercise, too. Your marathon walking guide will lead occasional weekend walks in the Harrisburg area beginning in June. Contact rsmurray@engineer.com to get details when they become available.
- Think about giving yourself a dress rehearsal. Participate in a local walk event, or, preferably, a road race that allows walkers. This gives you a chance to free some of the butterflies from your stomach before marathon day. (Recommended, if you are ready – the Harrisburg Half Marathon.)
- Determine your approximate pace from your long walks. If you cannot maintain a 17:00 to 17:30 mile pace over your longest walks, you may not be able to complete the marathon in the allotted time. Contact your walking

guide at rsmurray@engineer.com for suggestions to improve your pace and/or select an alternate event.

- **BE SAFE!** See your doctor before starting a new physical activity. Stay hydrated as you train. Wear sunscreen in the daytime. Stay in safe, well-lit areas at night. Carry some form of ID or at least a cell phone with programmed "In Case of Emergency" numbers. Wear a Medic Alert bracelet if you have a condition of which medical personnel should be aware. Don't try to train through an injury. Listen to your body, and if it tells you to see a doctor for a pain, do it!
- On marathon day, do what you've done in practice. Wear clothes, socks, shoes that you've worn in practice. Eat the foods that you've used in training – even though you may have to carry them yourself. Try to go at a level pace, despite the adrenaline that makes you want to race out from the start. Carry a map and make sure that you don't get lost. Talk to your fellow walkers, but if you start to get passed by runners, please go single file and move to the right. Enjoy the scenery. When you approach drink stations, grab a cup and keep walking so that you don't get run over. And when you cross the finish line, keep moving. Walk around a little bit more and stretch out your muscles gently to prevent stiffening up. Don't forget to smile! (It makes the runners curse to themselves as they see how good you feel in comparison to them.)
- **ENJOY YOURSELF**, and be proud of what you are doing. When you tell people that you are walking a marathon, don't say that you are "just" walking. You will cover the same 26.2 miles as everyone else. You are taking on a great challenge and joining elite company. Last year, 382,000 marathon finishing times were recorded in the USA. Considering that many marathoners (author included) complete more than one event per year, estimate that less than one tenth of one percent of the US population completes a marathon in any given year. Join that 0.1% – without the pounding of running – by walking the Harrisburg Marathon with us.

