Happy Half Marathon Beginner Training Plan

 BEFORE STARTING TO TRAIN FOR A HALF MARATHON, you need to possess a basic fitness level. And if you are over age 35, you probably should see your doctor for a physical examination. But assuming no major problems, most healthy people can train themselves to complete a 13.1-mile race.

The following schedule assumes you have the ability to run 3 miles, three to four times a week. If that seems difficult, consider a shorter distance for your first race--or take more time to develop an endurance base.

Pace: Don't worry about how fast you run your regular workouts. Run at a comfortable pace. If you're training with a friend, the two of you should be able to hold a conversation. If you can't do that, you're running too fast.

Distance: The training schedule dictates workouts at distances, from 3 to 10 miles. Don't worry about running precisely those distances, but you should come close. Pick a course through the neighborhood, or in some scenic area where you think you might enjoy running. Then measure the course either by car or bicycle. In deciding where to train, talk to other runners. They probably can point you to some accurately measured courses for your workouts. GPS watches seemingly make measuring courses easily, but trees and tall buildings sometimes can interfere with their accuracy.

Rest: Rest is as important a part of your training as the runs. You will be able to run the long runs on the weekend better--and limit your risk of injury--if you rest before, and rest after. Long Runs: The key to getting ready to finish a Half Marathon is the long run, progressively increasing in distance each weekend. Over a period of 14 weeks, your longest run will increase from 3 to 11 miles. Don't worry about making the final jump from 11 miles in practice to 13.1 miles in the race. Inspiration will carry you to the finish line, particularly if you taper the final week. The schedule below suggests doing your long runs on Saturdays, but you can do them Sundays, or any other convenient day, as long as you are consistent. (See "Juggling," below.)

Cross-Train: On the schedule above, this is identified simply as "cross." What form of cross-training works best? It could be swimming, cycling, walking (see below), cross-country skiing, hiking, or even some combination that could include strength training if you choose to do it on Wednesdays and Saturdays instead of as indicated on the schedule. And feel free to throw in some jogging as well if you're feeling good. In fact, on Wednesdays I offer you the option to run or cross-train. What cross-training you select depends on your personal preference. But don't make the mistake of cross-training too vigorously. Sports such as basketball or volleyball that involve sideways motions or sudden stops and starts do not qualify as cross-training. In fact, you may increase your risk of injury if you double up on these sports, particularly as the mileage builds. Cross-training days should be considered easy days that allow you to recover from the running you do the rest of the week.

Walking: Walking is an excellent exercise that a lot of runners overlook in their training. I don't specify walking breaks, but feel free to walk during your running workouts any time you feel tired or need to shift gears. When you go to the starting line in your fourteenth week, nobody will care whether you run the full Half Marathon; they're more concerned that you finish! If this means walking every step in practice and in the race, do it!

Stretch & Strength: Mondays are the days on which I advise you to spend extra time stretching--and do some strength training too. This is actually a day of "rest" following your long run on the weekends, so don't overdo it. It's wise to stretch every day, particularly after you finish your run, but spend more time stretching on Mondays. Strength training could consist of push-ups, pull-ups, use of free weights or working out with various machines at a health club. Runners generally benefit if they combine light weights with a high number of repetitions, rather than pumping very heavy iron. I also suggest that you strength train following your Thursday workouts, however you can schedule strength training on any two convenient days. If you have not strength trained before beginning this program, you may want to postpone starting that activity until after your race.

Take Time: Does the 16-week progression from 3 to 13.1 miles seem too tough? Do you have more than a dozen weeks before your selected Half Marathon? Lengthen the schedule; take 18 or even 20 weeks to prepare. Repeat the week just completed before moving up to the next level. Don't be afraid to insert "stepback" weeks, where you actually cut your distance every second or third week to gather forces for the next push upward.

Racing: It's not obligatory, but you might want to run a 5-K or 10-K to see how you're doing--and also to experience a road race, if you have not run one before. You will be able to use your times to predict your finishing time in the half marathon, and what pace to run that race.

Juggling: Don't be afraid to juggle the workouts from day to day and week to week. If you have an important business meeting on Thursday, do that workout on Wednesday instead. If your family is going to be on vacation one week when you will have more or less time to train, adjust the schedule accordingly. Be consistent with your training, and the overall details won't matter. Running 13.1 miles is not easy. If it were easy, there would be little challenge to an event such as the Half Marathon. Whether you plan your Half as a singular accomplishment or as a stepping stone to the even more challenging full marathon, crossing the finish line will give you a feeling of great accomplishment. Good luck with your training. This Half Marathon training schedule is only a guide. Feel free to make minor modifications to suit your work and family schedule.

	14 Week Beginner Half Marathon Training Program						
Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	Strength & Stretch	3 m run	2 m run or cross	3 m run & strength	Rest	30 min cross	4 m run
2	Strength & Stretch	3 m run	2 m run or cross	3m run & strength	Rest	30 min cross	4.5 m run
3	Strength & Stretch	3.5 m run	2 m run or cross	3.5 m run & strength	Rest	30 min cross	5 m run
4	Strength & Stretch	3 m run	2 m run or cross	3 m run & strength	Rest	30 min cross	3 m run
5	Strength & Stretch	4 m run	2 m run or cross	3.5 m run & strength	Rest	30 min cross	6 m run
6	Strength & Stretch	4.5 m run	2 m run or cross	4 m run & strength	Rest	40 min cross	7 m run
7	Strength & Stretch	4.5 m run	3 m run or cross	4 m run & strength	Rest	40 min cross	8 m run
8	Strength & Stretch	3 m run	2 m run or cross	3 m run & strength	Rest	30 min cross	4.5 m run
9	Strength & Stretch	4.5 m run	3 m run or cross	5 m run & strength	Rest	40 min cross	8 m run
10	Strength & Stretch	5 m run	3 m run or cross	5 m run & strength	Rest	40 min cross	10 m run
11	Strength & Stretch	3 m run	2 m run or cross	3 m run & strength	Rest	30 min cross	5 m run
12	Strength & Stretch	5 m run	3 m run or cross	5 m run & strength	Rest	40 min cross	11 m run
13	Strength & Stretch	5 m run	3 m run or cross	5 m run & strength	Rest	40 min cross	7 m run
14	Strength & Stretch	3 m run	2 m run or cross	Rest	20 min run	Race Day!	