

10 Tips to Master the Marathon

200-time sub-3:00 marathoner Doug Kurtis shares his secrets of success.

By Katherine Dempsey, Michele Moses

Finding a marathoner with more experience than Doug Kurtis is like locating an unoccupied porta potty five minutes before the start of a big race—it's extremely rare, if not impossible. Kurtis, 62, a writer and race director from Livonia, Michigan, has run 205 marathons in the last 40 years, finishing 200 of those in less than three hours. His 200th sub-3:00, last October's Detroit Free Press Marathon, made him one of 33 people to beat that mark in five separate decades.



Despite the high volume, Kurtis avoided burnout and injury by training smart—running slowly most of the time, varying his routes and training companions, and taking rest days when he felt he needed them. Still, he estimates he wore out about 700 pairs of shoes over the course of his career.

Since Detroit in October, he hasn't run another marathon, and he says he may not again (although we don't really believe him). "Two hundred at sub-3:00 was a nice place to stop," he says. "I had a long career because I had fun doing it. There's something really special about running a marathon." Here, Kurtis shares how you, too, can master the marathon.

Sign up—now!

Having a concrete goal is motivating—especially when you've paid for it—and the earlier you can get motivated, the better. Even if something comes up and you can't run the race, the entry fee is a worthwhile investment if it gets you out the door for a few months, Kurtis says.

Run most of your miles easy.

Kurtis's training plan calls for just one fast run—speedwork, a marathon-pace run, or a race—each week. The rest of the time, he advises running comfortably. Why? "A marathon is all about endurance, not speed," Kurtis says. "Speed comes from putting the miles in."

Give your shoes a rest.

Allowing your shoes to dry out for a day, even if they're just damp with sweat, will stop them from breaking down as quickly as they would if they didn't have time to recover, Kurtis says. And it's good to have a few models to cycle through—a 2013 study found that runners who wore different pairs of running shoes over 22 weeks had a 39 percent lower risk of running injury than those who used only one pair of shoes.

Use races as training runs.

Kurtis says running casual races without the pressure to beat a time has helped him defeat pre-race jitters—he's accustomed to feeling calm at the starting line. Plus, the camaraderie and the crowd support make any long distance feel easier and more fun. If you're using his training plan, you can swap any long weekend run with a race. For instance, if you're slated for a 12-miler, you could do a 10-mile race. Kurtis suggests running a few warmup miles and then running the race at a "fairly comfortable" pace.

Try two-a-days.

Doing a second workout when you're worn out from your first is a lot like running the last stretch of a marathon: By training yourself to do the former, you'll be more capable of the latter. "When you're at mile 20 of a marathon, you have more confidence because you know you can go out and run while you're tired," says Kurtis. He suggests adding a second, three-mile easy run to any running day when you have extra time.

Hear what your body's saying.

Kurtis hasn't dealt with major running injuries, partially because he seeks help at the first sign of a problem. "If there's something that doesn't seem right, I don't hesitate at all to call my doctor," he

says. This also often means modifying your training plan. "If you have a serious calf cramp and you're scheduled to do a 20-miler, you have to move it to another day," Kurtis says. "Listen and back off."

Find a friend—or a few.

Kurtis has been running with groups or partners for years as a form of motivation and support. "I can go out alone at a nine-minute pace and feel like I'm working, or I can go out with somebody and do a seven-minute pace and it's easy," he says.

Just adjust!

Kurtis's training program—and any plan you find in a magazine or online, for that matter—should be modified to fit your needs. If you run five days per week instead of six, you can pair one day's short run with a longer run on another day, he says. For instance, if you skip a three-miler, add it to a seven-mile day. Training for a rolling race? Substitute a hill workout for one—or a few—of the schedule's pace or track sessions.

Conjure your magic words.

Kurtis has an assortment of simple, encouraging phrases that get him through "bad patches" of runs and races. He's told himself, "relax, relax, relax" at a race's start and repeated "be patient" when competitors charged ahead. "If you just let the discomfort pass and tell yourself, 'I'm going to get through this,' you usually do," he says.

Cooldown carefully.

Don't rush through postrun stretches, and take care not to overdo them—the risk of stretching-related injury can be high for certain runners. "I see people get hurt doing yoga," Kurtis says. "They want to be competitive, so they push and find out, 'My body can't handle that.'"