

Crush Back-to- Back Race Days

Plan your race schedule smart so you don't set yourself up for burnout.

THERE'S A REASON you'll probably never see Desiree Linden, Galen Rupp, or other top pros race both the Chicago and New York Marathons. Elites know that pushing themselves that hard in more than one major marathon per season can hinder performance in race number two.

But running back-to-back races isn't that uncommon for amateurs, whether it's at running festivals in which you can do multiple races on consecutive days, or simply because there are so many races within weeks during peak running season. Some of us sign up immediately after one race because we botched a PR opp; others just want to keep riding that runner's high to the next finish line.

There's no need to settle for just one major race per season, as long as you know what you're getting into.

Why You Fall Apart

General running wisdom tends not to support stacking races

involving a marathon distance because after mile 20—the longest long run in most marathon training plans—you push your body beyond its physical limits, says Janet Hamilton, an exercise physiologist and running coach with Running Strong.com. And running at race effort adds another element of stress. “Physiologically, you're going to tax your energy resources, you may experience microtrauma in muscle cells, and you'll probably experience some mental fatigue,” she says.

If you push yourself that far again too soon, you'll increase your risk of injury. It's also not uncommon for runners to experience reduced immune function and slower recovery afterward. “Long-duration, maximum-effort activities place huge loads on a variety of areas—muscle tissues, tendons, bones, even blood vessels and the mucosal linings of the respiratory system,” Hamilton says. “Tissue repair →



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TOTALLY WORTHY BACK-TO-BACK CHALLENGES

Dopey Challenge.

The mileage might be grueling—5K, 10K, half marathon, and a final 26.2 in four days—but at least you're in the Happiest Place on Earth. More info: rundsney.com

RW Half & Festival

Come race with us! Our weekend of running nets you 26.2 miles over three days, with a 3.8-mile trail on Friday, back-to-back 5K/10K on Saturday, and a half marathon to close. More info: runnersworld.com/rwhalf

Bermuda Triangle Challenge

These three races in three days—5K, 10K, and either a half or full marathon—may leave you feeling slightly lost. More info: bermudaraceweekend.com

→ and regeneration takes time and metabolic energy, and if you divert that metabolic energy to resume hard training too soon, you may shortchange the repair and regeneration process.”

That’s still true if you’re following a marathon with a half, and potentially even back-to-back halves. “While a half marathon is half the distance, it’s also run at a harder effort than a full marathon,” she adds. “It’s still a maximum-effort activity and still deserves respect in terms of recovery.”

lutely would not want to tax the same energy system that you just used. That’s why I think some people feel totally fried or flat in race number two—their central nervous system gets attacked and overloaded.” Instead, if you’re running between eight and 16 miles, break that up into mile reps over a 24-hour period. For instance: three 4-mile runs throughout the day versus 12 miles at once. For faster workouts, keep your intervals to just 30 or 60 seconds with double the rest.

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“FATIGUE USUALLY FADES FASTER THAN FITNESS DOES,” SAYS HAMILTON. “BY TAKING SOME RECOVERY TIME AFTER THE RACE, YOU’LL HOPEFULLY REDUCE FATIGUE, BUT YOU WON’T LOSE MUCH FITNESS.”

How to Stay Strong

Leah Rosenfeld, a Flagstaff, Arizona-based coach for the Run SMART Project, an online coaching service, has a simple but effective prescription for recovery: “Ideally, after a marathon, you get one day of recovery per mile of running,” she says. “That’s about three weeks of light, active recovery work; then it would be ideal to have another three to four weeks to build up again before another race. So you would have about two months between races.”

One thing you don’t want to do between the two races: additional steady-state runs, cautions Rosenfeld. “You abso-

If you’re going to do something that requires high mileage in a short amount of time (like a running festival or multi-leg relay race), Hamilton suggests getting your longest training run up to a distance that’s equivalent to the total you’ll be racing.

The Ultimate Save

And, of course, Hamilton says, you can always just decide to take it easy. “Completing an event at a submaximal effort will not result in the same tissue damage profile as competing in an event at a maximal effort. If you run an event rather than race it, the calculus changes.” 

BOUNCE BACK LIKE A BOSS!

During the race:

Hydrate not just with water, but also with electrolytes—they help replenish everything you sweat out.

First 24 hours

post-race: Warm and loosen your muscles with a hot, Epsom salt bath, then manually massage everything that hurts. Skip the anti-inflammatory drugs. They may interrupt healing and tissue repair.

First few days:

A sports massage, stretching, and foam rolling help keep everything moving properly. Get out and walk, too—that stimulates blood flow and provides low-level stress that encourages healing.