

Multiple Marathons

Running More Than One 26-Miler A Year

One participant in my *Virtual Training* posted a message after finishing [The LaSalle Bank Chicago Marathon](#) saying she would like to run another marathon the following spring--and Chicago again in the fall. "But isn't that against the rule that you should only run one marathon a year?" she worried.

Well, no such "rule" exists. And if one *did* exist, some running rules are meant to be broken--as long as you are well-trained and know what you're doing. Several members of my V-Team doubled back after Chicago to run Marine Corps, New York, Honolulu or other fall marathons. Many were already planning spring marathons such as Flying Pig, Rock 'n' Roll and Grandma's. A high percentage of runners qualified at Chicago for the Boston Marathon and added that grand oldie to their list of 26-milers. [Runner's World](#) lists 300 marathons on its race calendar, 50 of them international. Run only one marathon a year and you do limit your horizons.

"I don't want to limit myself to one a year," states Amanda Musacchio of Villa Park, Illinois, "and I also don't want to miss Chicago." A Boston qualifier, she ran the Marine Corps Marathon three weeks after Chicago last year.

Insanity at its purest level

That's insanity at its purest level, but who am I to point the finger of guilt? On several occasions, I have run multiple marathons with only a week or two break. In 1978, I ran a 2:30:28 at the New York City Marathon, a national age record at the time. The following weekend, I had an appearance scheduled at the Miracle Strip Marathon in Panama City, Florida and confessed to Olympian Marty Liquori that I was thinking of running it. "Why would you want to do that?" Marty asked.

"Just to see if I can do it," I responded.

"Would you jump off the Brooklyn Bridge just to see if you can do it?"

Marty had a point as I discovered a dozen miles into the Panama City race. I ran that far in the lead with Barry Brown, who also had run New York. Then I crashed badly and had to struggle to finish in 2:59:37. Barry went on to win, but I saw him around 22 miles at an out-and-back part of the course. He looked worse than I did!

On several other occasions, I have run multiple marathons. I ran six marathons in six weeks to celebrate my sixtieth birthday and [seven marathons in seven months to celebrate my seventieth birthday](#). In between, I ran ten during the space of one year so I could run my 100th marathon at the 100th Boston Marathon in 1996.

Stunts to impress

While such stunts impress those who have run only a few marathons, I am far from being unique--or being the most obsessive multiple marathoner. Midway through my 7-7-70 quest, I ran the [Heart of America Marathon](#) in Columbia, Missouri on Labor Day. The day before the race, I encountered a runner who was doing 100 marathons in two years. He had just arrived in town after running a marathon in Tupelo, Mississippi earlier that Sunday morning!

A survey of V-Teamers reveals that many run two or three marathons a year. They succeed by maintaining a training base near 25 miles a week year-round, which allows them to ramp up to 50 weekly miles during any marathon build-up. My training programs run 18 weeks. Do the arithmetic ($3 \times 18 = 54$), and it does become possible to squeeze three marathons into a single year.

But there are probably more efficient ways to run Multiple Marathons, particularly since you don't have to back all the way down to the first (low-mileage) week each time you set your sights on a marathon. After a reasonable amount of time for rest, you can begin in the middle. One approach is to follow my [Senior Marathon Training Program](#), "senior" in that it is designed for experienced runners. Only eight weeks long, it features only three days of running a week, but runs longer than in most of my other schedules.

Actually, experienced runners know that after several weeks recovery, an 8- or 12-week build-up probably suffices, except for those seeking peak performance. An intelligent option is running some marathons at less-than-best effort just to enjoy the experience. A 26-mile run thus becomes an extra-long workout.

Training strategies

To run multiple marathons without raising your risk of injury, you do need to know what you're doing. Here are some training strategies:

1. **Plan your schedule early.** Select multiple marathons well in advance. That allows you to plan your training around more than one race.
2. **Don't ignore rest.** Your body needs time to rebound before training hard again. Muscle soreness ends after a few days, but full recovery may take three to four weeks.
3. **Try shorter events.** Races at 5-K, 10-K and half-marathon distances still are worthy of your attention. They can serve as speedwork.
4. **Don't run all marathons hard.** Enter some seeking less than peak performance. This makes most sense if running back-to-back marathons with less than eight weeks between.
5. **Take time to prepare.** When serious about a marathon, prepare very carefully. Use the full 18 weeks in my [marathon training programs](#) to ensure a Personal Best.

Here are some training strategies for runners running marathons two, four, six and eight weeks apart. If you're running marathons with an odd number of weeks between (three, five, seven, etc.), simply repeat one of the middle weeks. For a slightly different approach on the subject, see the chapter on "Multiple Marathons" (pp. 77-84) in [Hal Higdon's How To Train](#). And while you're surfing around my Web site, check also my [Post Marathon Training Guide](#) for more advice on recovery.

Two weeks between

With only two weeks between marathons, you really don't have time to train. Focus instead on recovery. Maintain the same high-carbohydrate diet between marathons one and two that you (hopefully) did before the first. Schedule a massage 48 to 72 hours after the first marathon and (if your budget permits) a second massage before the second. You may want to do as much walking as running in the workouts below. The 6-mile run suggested for Saturday very definitely should *not* be fast. And what do I mean when I prescribe "1-2 hours" on Sunday? To be quite honest, I'm not quite sure. Let your body dictate whether you want to spend that time running, walking, cross-training or just lying in front of a TV set. Regardless of what you do during these two weeks, you are not going to improve your fitness. So concentrate instead on easy activities that will promote your recovery.

Two Weeks Between Marathons							
Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Su
2	Rest	Rest	2 m run	3 m run	Rest	6 m run	1-2 hours
1	Rest	4 m run	2 m run	Rest	Rest	2 m run	Marathon

Four weeks between

With four weeks between marathons, you have the opportunity to at least do *some* training. It will be more for your mind than for your body. Physically, your body should still be in recovery mode, but I know from my own multiple marathon experiences that successful running is as much psychological as it is physical. So do some training; just don't overdo it. In the four-week training program below, the first week should be entirely for recovery (and don't overlook what I said above about the benefits of massage). The fourth week is your taper week. The two weeks between provide time to do *some* training. As above, I have prescribed the Sunday workouts in hours rather than miles to allow you some flexibility. If you are an Intermediate or Advanced runner, who is accustomed to doing speedwork, you might want to pick Tuesdays and/or Thursdays to do some fast running. But please don't overdo it. What kind of speedwork? The same kind you were doing leading into the marathon. Don't experiment with anything new.

Four Weeks Between Marathons							
Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Su
4	Rest	2 m run	3 m run	4 m run	Rest	6 m run	1-2 hours
3	Rest	3 m run	6 m run	3 m run	Rest	6 m run	2 hours
2	Rest	4 m run	6 m run	4 m run	Rest	6 m run	2-3 hours

1	Rest	2 m run	3 m run	Rest	Rest	2 m run	Marathon
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Six weeks between

With six weeks between marathons, this offers more time for recovery and tapering--but also more time for training. Thus the conundrum: On what element should you focus during this between-marathon period? I can't answer that question. You will need to read your own body signs. I am inclined to suggest that you continue to think "recovery" the first and second weeks after the first marathon (Weeks 6 and 5) and think "taper" two weeks before the next marathon (Weeks 2 and 1). That allows you two weeks of what might be described as serious training. That could include some speedwork as suggested to the Four-Weeks-Between group above. But be very cautious about pressing too hard on the accelerator pedal. And don't be afraid to program in more rest days, if necessary. I continue to recommend massages.

Six Weeks Between Marathons							
Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Su
6	Rest	2 m run	3 m run	4 m run	Rest	6 m run	1-2 hours
5	Rest	3 m run	6 m run	3 m run	Rest	6 m run	12 m run
4	Rest	4 m run	6 m run	4 m run	Rest	6 m run	14 m run
3	Rest	4 m run	6 m run	4 m run	Rest	6 m run	16 m run
2	Rest	4 m run	6 m run	4 m run	Rest	6 m run	10 m run
1	Rest	2 m run	3 m run	Rest	Rest	2 m run	Marathon

Eight weeks between

With eight weeks between marathons, you have time to do some serious training. If you haven't already done so, now would be a good time to consider my [Senior Marathon Training Program](#), which does last eight weeks (although it features only three days of running a week). As with the previous program above, consider that the first two weeks (Weeks 8 and 7) are for recovery and the last two weeks (Weeks 2 and 1) are for tapering. In between, you have nearly a full month to fine-tune your training. *Whooooeee!* Let's fly! I've positioned a 20-mile run equal-distant between the two marathons with a pair of 16-milers book-ending them. I'm not

sure you need a lot of extra mileage. If you feel fully recovered, run some of the 6-milers at an up-tempo. Advanced runners can do some speed workouts, but be cautious about running to exhaustion. I would concentrate more on quality than quantity at this point.

Eight Weeks Between Marathons							
Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Su
8	Rest	2 m run	3 m run	4 m run	Rest	6 m run	1-2 hours
7	Rest	3 m run	6 m pace	3 m run	Rest	6 m run	12 m run
6	Rest	4 m run	6 m run	4 m run	Rest	6 m pace	16 m run
5	Rest	4 m run	6 m pace	4 m run	Rest	6 m run	20 m run
4	Rest	4 m run	6 m run	4 m run	Rest	6 m pace	12 m run
3	Rest	4 m run	6 m pace	4 m run	Rest	6 m run	16 m run
2	Rest	4 m run	6 m run	4 m run	Rest	6 m pace	12 m run
1	Rest	2 m run	3 m run	Rest	Rest	2 m run	Marathon

Can you combine the above schedules to run three, four, five or more marathons during a relatively short period of time? Anything is possible, and runners differ so much in their ability to recover and to survive punishing training regimens that I can't dictate what you should or shouldn't do. But after a bout of multiple marathons, consider taking some time off from training, at least from hard training. And don't overlook the value of training for short race distances as a means of improving not only your speed, but also your strength. Variety, in this case, *is* the spice of marathoning life.