

# Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

## After the Marathon . . .

**YOU MADE IT. YOU FINISHED A** marathon. Whether it's your first or your fiftieth, the feeling is still the same: exhilaration, which, at some point, gives way to the tired, achy feeling that inevitably comes from having logged more than 26 miles in a single stretch.

Too often we try to ignore what our body is telling us and carry on with our regular training. This inevitably leads to that flat, "out-of-shape" feeling, illness, or worse, an injury that sidelines you for weeks or even months.

### **Take it Easy**

**Rest**—which many athletes consider a four-letter word—is one of the most important components of a successful training program. Endurance events such as a marathon pose special challenges in replenishing hydration levels and fluid stores, repairing/remodeling cellular disruption in skeletal muscle and regaining a sensible mental drive. Other factors, such as environmental conditions (hot/cold, calm/windy, humid/dry), terrain (hilly/flat), intensity, and your own physical state (rested/fatigued, trained/untrained) also may affect the recovery process.

Here are some guidelines to help ensure your recovery process:

### **The First Few Hours**

**Keep moving and change clothes as soon as possible to stay warm.** Resist the tendency to just stop and plop! A gradual cool-down is important and will enhance the recovery process.

**Drink, drink, drink.** Complete restoration of your fluid balance is a critical part of the recovery process, particularly in hot, humid conditions. A combination of water and sports drinks will help replenish lost fluids, sodium and electrolytes.

**Alcohol and caffeine should be avoided** during the rehydration process as both may potentially increase urine output.



**Eat.** Early food intake is essential to fuel replacement following endurance exercise, and also assists in restoring hydration levels. While complete reloading of muscular glycogen supplies may take up to 48 to 72 hours, a significant portion can be refueled in the initial 2 hours after the race.

**Check yourself out.** Look for blisters, rashes and other irritated areas that may require treatment to prevent infection and further injury.

### **Week One**

**Relax.** This is your week to do "nothing." Give your musculoskeletal system a break, an opportunity to repair and remodel. Even if you do not experience excessive fatigue and soreness, resist the temptation to train. What's a week of rest compared to spending two to four months recovering from a major illness or injury? Studies have shown that muscular strength five days after an event is greater in athletes who completely rest than those who jog or exercise in the days following the marathon.

Additionally, continuing to exercise, even in a limited fashion, will only delay the refueling/rehydration process. And, as you move back in to physical activity, the temptation to start training harder again grows—too soon. Giving

in to the temptation to train harder at this point in time generally leads to an extended recovery from unnecessary injury.

### **Weeks Two to Four**

**Gradually return to your training routine,** but remember that complete musculoskeletal recovery may take up to a month. Start out at 25 percent or less of your normal average training quantity at an easy intensity. Increase to 35 percent to 40 percent during week three and no more than 50 percent by week four. During weeks three and four, it is okay to consider doing one or two tempo-type training sessions. Don't be afraid to take a day or two off should you start feeling soreness and/or fatigue.

**Maintain proper hydration and emphasize good nutrition** throughout this recovery month. Your muscles need adequate fuel and protein intake to continue healing and adapting once again to the training routine. Pay attention to restoring flexibility and mobility, but be careful not to over-stretch. This is especially critical during the first two weeks following the competition. After the first month continue to gradually increase your training (10 percent to 15 percent per week) until you've eased back into your normal routine.

Good luck, and remember, rest means the opportunity to compete and train—an injury means watching from the sidelines.

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