Stretching and short recovery runs can help kick-start the post-marathon recovery process.

# RecoveryBlocks
Recovering from a marathon is a multi-step process.
**BY ALAN CULPEPPER**

Coaches and runners alike are always eager to talk about training methods, new exercise combinations and workout intensities on the way to a goal race or long-term training plan. The one missing element in many of those conversations is recovery.

Post-race rest and recovery is a critical element regardless of your ability level. This is exacerbated by longer events, but the principal determining factor is intensity.

## THE MARATHON IS DIFFERENT
The marathon is unlike any other event as it relates to overall depletion and the physical and emotional stress placed on the body. It takes longer to recover from a marathon than it does an Ironman triathlon, even though the Ironman is significantly longer. The different intensity of an Ironman and the dynamic of using different muscle groups as well as constant fueling throughout the first two thirds of the event are such that you recover quicker after that event than a stand-alone marathon.

With shorter running races, it's a given that you can bounce back pretty quickly — anywhere from three to seven days of easy running post-race, depending on the distance and intensity. But with a marathon, a 14- to 21-day window is usually necessary. Intensity is the key aspect to consider when it comes to recovery. You can run 26 miles every weekend at an easy effort and feel some level of fatigue, but you can keep training. The greater the intensity of a race effort, the more recovery time you need after the race — physically as well as emotionally. Intensity affects both considerably and if not respected, it will only lead to poor performances down the road.

## RUNNERS VARY
The marathon is unique, and every runner has a different response to the distance and a different ability to recover from it. My first marathon left me completely destroyed. Within minutes of crossing the finish line, I knew I was going to be suffering for several days. It took me 30 minutes to walk the half-mile back to the hotel with a stiff-legged, awkward and uncoordinated gait. But that wasn't always the case.

Weather conditions, hydration, race-day and post-race fueling, stretching, massage, and ice baths all factor into recovery — so does the simple fact that we all recover differently. Some runners

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## FIVE QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK YOURSELF AFTER A RACE:

**1/** How hard did I really run? Be honest with yourself. How hard did you really push?

**2/** Were the conditions hot, humid or cold? The more extreme the conditions, the longer the recovery.

**3/** How was my race-day fueling? If it was poor (including post-race), that affects recovery.

**4/** How did the race unfold? Did I bonk or struggle abnormally the last few miles? If you had a hard time maintaining a reasonable pace for the last portion of the race, a longer recovery is likely needed.

**5/** How do I feel a few days after the race? Three to four days after the race is a good time to reassess how you feel with a very short, easy shakeout run.

naturally store more glycogen (fuel) in their muscles and don't get as depleted as others. Be truthful with yourself and trust your instincts while understanding that two weeks is the recommended minimum amount of recovery time before you start building back up your training.

### HOW TO REST — AND RUN AGAIN

When I was younger, I would take weeks completely off from running without thinking twice about it. As I got older, I recognized that I often felt more aches and pains and suffered a few slight injuries after an extended break. Even if you are prudent in your buildup, you are still susceptible to injury after a longer break from training.

The best way to get the rest you need post-marathon without taking significant time completely off is by running very easy every third day. The run does not have to be long (25 to 35 minutes is plenty) and can be at a very easy effort. The goal is not to tax your aerobic or muscular systems. By running sparingly, you keep your muscular system firing and tendons strong. By going easy, you can still recover.

### POST-MARATHON RECOVERY TIPS

• **Stretch well.** A 15- to 20-minute stretching session the night after the race can help speed muscular recovery.

• **Take anti-inflammatories the night after the race.** They will help reduce inflammation and provide an initial boost in recovery. Taking anti-inflammatories beyond the first day or so after the race is not recommended.

• **Hydrate.** You will most likely be sick of sports drinks post-race, so rely on water to help get your hydration levels back up. It takes several days to fully rehydrate.

• **Eat.** There is nothing better than a good meal to aid recovery. Ideally, try to eat a full meal within two hours of finishing.

• **Run.** Head out for a short jog three days after the race and then again every third day for a two- to three-week period.

Two-time U.S. Olympian ALAN CULPEPPER helps runners of all abilities via his website at culpeppercoaching.com.