

# Eight Ways To Ruin A Marathon

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 Wednesday, 06 February 2008  
 Last Updated Friday, 29 February 2008

I have probably heard all of the stories of marathon PRs lost, the tales of woe and angst of training seemingly gone awry on any given Sunday. With a sly grin and an optimistic view, I've found just about all of them to be preventable. All it requires is becoming a smarter athlete - plain and simple.

The AT&T Austin Marathon is 11 days away. Let's take a moment to go over a few of the top ways to ruin your marathon ... there's still plenty of time to remedy them!

1. Get injured. This is the one that I probably see the most. In your quest for the perfect training, you tried to jam in one last long run. Surely that will be the "magic bullet", the workout that makes the difference between being on your game and not. First of all, there's no magical workout - and as Kenny Rogers used to lament, "you gotta know when to hold'em, know when to fold'em, know when to walk away, know when to run". Your best training is already in the bank - now let it accrue interest for your race day payday!

2. Don't develop a race plan. You mean I actually need to know when to consume carbohydrate, when to hydrate, and at what rate is best for me? I call this "race management" - the cognitive task of simply having a plan and the discipline to implement it.

3. Do something during the race that you've not done before. You think "oh, I will just go ahead and use whatever drink/gel/etc are on the course, it won't be a problem". Problem - no. Gastrointestinal nightmare - perhaps. Many people have an adverse response to fructose - especially during longer duration events. Many sport drinks have - you guessed it - fructose. Know how your body functions in training - and if you plan on using what the race support provide, then use it in your training weeks if not months in advance. If you don't plan on using what is on the course - bring your own. A gel flask can be a simple solution. It can also extend to wearing a new pair of cool socks from the Expo, or similar craziness. If you've not done it in training, you're not doing it on race day!!!

4. Don't accommodate the race day conditions. It's unseasonably warm (or cold) - ahhh, I will just have to suck it up and go, right? No! Well, yes ... the race goes on - but it may require some advance changes in your race plan. You must do whatever you can to optimize your fueling and hydration - as this is the primary reason for power output loss (otherwise known as "getting a visit from the wall"). If it's colder than expected, dress in layers and peel them off as your body gets into prime operating conditions once it's warmed up. Tying a shirt around your waist just isn't going to slow you down. It might not look quite as good on the race photos, but if you don't get to the finish, it won't matter anyways.

5. Stay far too focused on the outcome and not the process. If you take care of each moment as you go, then the result will be as good as it can be, regardless of the conditions. This requires attentional focus, and it also requires simply "letting go". You are not your marathon time - your identity is not defined by it. Take care of each mile, and 26.2 miles will go along as successfully as possible. The time will be whatever it is - based on whatever you'd put in the bank and whatever happens on that given day.

6. Don't bother driving the course. Why would you? Ignorance is bliss. It's 26.2 miles isn't it? Of course you would! Hopefully you've already done so - if not, then you need to. Get an understanding of the dynamics of the course - know where you can push, and know where you need to hold back. Once again, Kenny Rogers had it right.

7. Quit strength training. It won't matter now. Well, yes it will! It can continue to have an impact on your tissue integrity and power output. I have all of my athletes continue to strength train until 3 or 4 days out from the race. I want them to maintain those benefits - and not start de-training.

8. Don't consume any carbohydrate until you're at mile 16/18/20 (insert mileage number here). Who needs it? YOU DO! Carbohydrate intake needs to start early. Though your muscles can store plenty of fuel (in the form of glycogen), you have limited resources for your central nervous system. It doesn't have the luxury of storage quite the way that your muscles do - glycogen in the blood stream and liver is the limited fuel source it can access. No fuel, no impulse from the central nervous system - no muscle contraction - no go. Start early - 20 to 30 minutes into the event - and stay on a "carbohydrate drip" (consistently) until you are within 20 minutes of the finish. If you consume anything after this, all it will do is fuel the car ride back to the hotel!

I'd say that would account for most of the ways to have a lousy marathon - and most of the tips for prevention.

So let's end on the positive - a quick summary of what you need to do on game day:

Eat, Drink, And Be Merry!

Fuel and hydration have already been discussed. There are more guidelines to be found in the "Downloads" section of this site. The primary factor relating to your power output loss over time (otherwise known as "hitting the wall") are nutritional factors. At this point, I hope you've already done your homework on these issues.

But let's face it - the last item is last, but not least. You've worked hard to get there - no go out and enjoy it! Seize the day - and make it your PR marathon. Have fun!

See you at the finish!

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