

BEATING THE POST-MARATHON BLUES

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So, you trained for months and months...endured blisters and chafing. You missed fun Saturday night's out with friends because you had to get up at the crack of dawn to run 18 miles before it got too hot. You were willing because the reward was one of man's greatest physical challenges and therefore accomplishments: completing a Marathon; 26.2 miles of physical endurance and mental/emotional stamina.

Race day arrives, you complete your task and you do it well. You are elated...nothing has ever filled you with such a sense of being alive and accomplishment except for maybe the birth of a child. Then, for many runners something strange starts to occur. As the days post-marathon pass by you start to feel a little subdued, "lost", without a mission. To make it worse your body has been through the ringer of pounding 26.2 miles, and you are not even able to get a good workout in to kick those endorphins back into high gear. You actually think you feel depressed....sound familiar?

The high that comes from a good marathon can quickly change into a major downer if you don't have a plan for the aftermath. That plan doesn't have to culminate in another marathon, or even another race, but it should contain some meaningful goals, such as maintaining a specific weekly mileage or just making sure you run a certain number of days every week. Of course, it's important to be flexible with your goals to avoid injury. But after running a marathon, you're at a very high fitness level, and with the right training focus you can make the most of it.

For many runners planning another race before crossing the finish line of your goal marathon is an excellent strategy to head off this post-marathon blues syndrome. Marathon training leaves you with a great base of aerobic fitness that doesn't vanish immediately after your marathon is over. You can capitalize on that fitness, sharpen your speed, and turn it all into fast 5-Ks and 10-Ks.

But having post-marathon racing plans doesn't mean pounding out a track workout two days after your marathon. Instead, you need to focus on recovery in the first few weeks after the race so that you're better able to progress in training in the subsequent weeks. During those weeks, try running on grass and trails to lessen the pounding on your still-sore muscles, and listen to your body. The last thing you want to do is force racing again if your body isn't ready. (For the record, I learned this the hard way after trying to race the Miami Half-Marathon two weeks after the Disney full....I barely was able to finish in a disappointing 1:20. I have had training runs that fast!).

Signs that you're rushing your recovery include prolonged fatigue, loss of appetite, feeling lethargic on your runs for several days in a row, severe mood swings or depression, illness, (this happened to me in the form of a severe sinus infection and fever right after Disney) and, of course, any running-related injury. Encountering any of these symptoms means you may need to scale back on your post-race goals, but just a bit. So instead of racing that Half Marathon or 15K 2-3 weeks post marathon, give yourself some more time and focus on the local fun 5k the next month.

But the time to start thinking about life after the marathon is now (before your marathon goal race). Create your post-race goals during the month before your event. Write them down so you can keep your mind stimulated with future endeavors.

If you're afraid that planning your post-marathon running so far in advance will distract you from the singular focus your earlier marathon demands, don't buy into that line of thinking. A great benefit of planning ahead is that you're not setting yourself up for the idea that this marathon is the culminating event of your running career. Having post-race goals on the horizon reminds you that this one race does not define you as a runner or a person.

Regardless of what your post-marathon plans are, experts agree your general approach to training in the four weeks after the marathon should be this: Recover initially, and then gradually add quality and volume so that you emerge injury-free, mentally fresh, and able to capitalize on the fitness you built during marathon training for the next racing challenge ahead.

*****If you are interested in learning more about Sonja's consulting or coaching services regarding training and racing programming please visit www.runfastpromotions.com or contact her via sfuhl@aol.com.***