

# Getting Ready to Race

Everything You Need to Do in the Final 24 Hours Before a Race

**Different strokes work for different folks, but some pre-race rules always apply:**

1. DO pack your race bag the day before
2. DO find out about the race course
3. DO drink plenty of fluids
4. DO mentally rehearse your race plan
5. DO set two alarms for race morning
6. DON'T fatigue yourself with activities
7. DON'T try any unfamiliar foods
8. DON'T tolerate negative thoughts about the race
9. DON'T overdress on race morning

## THE DAY BEFORE

### Logistics:

Double-check directions to the race start and have a street map handy if you are from out of town. Gas up the car. Read the entire race entry form, which may contain crucial information about packet pick-up, parking, or some other race detail that affects your arrival time. Finally, pack your race bag after checking the weather forecast. The following is a suggested list of race bag items:

- Cap, light in color (optional)
- Cell phone (to call home after you nail a personal best)
- Change of clothes, socks, shoes
- Energy bars or gel packets
- Race entry form
- Extra shoelaces
- Full bottle of water or sports drink
- Lubricant (Vaseline or Body Glide)
- Money
- Safety pins (for your race number)
- Street map
- Sunglasses
- Timing chip, secured on race shoes
- Toilet paper
- Towels
- Water resistant sunscreen (spf +15) if sunny

Do all of this early the day prior to the event. This way, you'll have enough time to hunt down any missing information or items you'll need race morning. If you procrastinate, you'll have to deal with the stress of race day preparation at the worst possible time - bedtime.

### Physical Preparation:

A walk, walk/jog, or easy run the day before the race will help keep your muscles limber and help relieve any pre-race jitters. Don't do too much! Twenty minutes should do the trick.

Other than a very easy walk or run, try to stay off of your feet as much as possible. This is a great day to take in a movie or catch up on some light reading.

### **Mental Preparation:**

Mentally "rehearsing" your race plan will help calm your nerves. If possible, drive the course (earlier in the week) or take a look at the course map and topography on the race website (LR Marathon note: driving the entire course is complicated by the fact around miles 16 - 19 the course is on a pedestrian thoroughfare - but rest assured, this is a very flat section of the course). If you do drive the course, it's a good idea to set the car odometer at 0.0 and make a mental note of any landmarks that might coincide with certain mile marks.

Do your best to focus on relaxation. Staying mentally relaxed will help you remain physically relaxed during the race. Have you ever noticed how the top runners/walkers always make it look so easy? They focus on their race plan and concentrate on staying physically relaxed.

### **Food:**

THE CARDINAL RULE FOR PRE-RACE EATING: stick to familiar foods and emphasize carbohydrate intake. "For breakfast and lunch the day before a race, don't eat anymore or less than you normally would, but be sure you are getting plenty of carbohydrates," says Kristine Clark, Ph.D. and Registered Dietician, Penn State University's Director of Sports Nutrition. "Stick to what you've tried and what works for you."

### **Drink:**

It's essential to hydrate the day before a race that is long, hot, or both. "You need to consume lots of water the day before a long race," says Clark, "because it will allow you to sweat more on race day, which will cool your body more efficiently." Take in eight ounces per waking hour in the last 24 hours, though this doesn't have to be straight water. Soup and juices are often about 90 percent water. Fruits and vegetables are also good sources, and even cooked pasta is two-thirds water.

## **THE NIGHT BEFORE**

### **Logistics:**

With your schedule planned and your bag packed, just one detail remains: ensuring that you'll wake up with plenty of time on race morning. First, set your alarm clock. Second, set your running watch alarm or a second alarm clock, or arrange for a wake-up call.

Follow your usual evening routine and go to bed at regular usual time. Don't panic if you don't fall asleep right away – just lay still and relax.

### **Physical Preparation:**

The evening before a race, even more than the day before, is a time to relax. No dancing, clubbing, or staying up late. Sex is fine if it is relaxing and not an endurance event.

### **Mental Preparation:**

Choose a calming or distracting activity, like enjoying a movie or reading a good book. If you end up tossing and turning half the night, don't worry about it. Your race performance will not be affected unless you slept poorly the previous night or two. Sleep research shows that mild sleep deprivation has little effect on physical performance.

### **Food:**

Some runners/walkers can devour an enchilada grande the night before a race, while others have to settle for a child's portion. The key is not to overeat. To ensure that you don't go to bed too full, the safest bet is to eat an early and relatively light dinner with emphasis on easily digestible foods like CARBOHYDRATES (pasta, potatoes,

rice) and lean proteins (poultry, fish, or eggs). "High-fiber and high-fat foods stay in the gut longer," says Clark, "so steer clear of them the night before a race." Foods to avoid might include burgers, beans, whole-wheat products, and most dairy products.

### **Drink:**

Hydrating on race eve is tricky. If you don't drink at all, you risk dehydration during the race. Drink too much, and you'll be back and forth to the restroom all night, disrupting your sleeping pattern. The best strategy is to drink juice or a sports drink (for their electrolyte content) hourly, then stop drinking an hour before bedtime. Coffee and alcoholic beverages can disturb your sleep, so it's best to avoid them.

## **RACE MORNING**

### **Logistics:**

Your alarm should go off in time to give you a half-hour to dress, eat a quick bite, and allow enough driving time to arrive at the start area one hour prior to the race.

Most of your time at the race start should consist of a very, very light warm up (five - 15 minutes of easy walking/jogging if it's a long race), relaxing, and conversing with friends. Do your best to avoid standing in long lines, as your legs might stiffen and nerves begin to fray. Skip the registration line by pre-registering and picking up your race number and information the day before. To avoid the long lines at the porta-johns, visit a gas station restroom on the way to the race.

About 45 minutes before the race, do a bit of easy walking to begin your warm-up. Keep this warm-up at no more than 15 minutes. A half-hour before the race, do a bit of light stretching while chatting with your friends or mentally reviewing your race plan. Ten minutes before the start, do a bit more jogging, with some slow 20-second pick-ups to prepare your mind and body for the race ahead. Five minutes before, make sure you are in the appropriate pace group, if these are designated. Listen to any announcements and jog in place.

### **Mental Preparation:**

"Before a race, the key is to think only positive thoughts," says Frank Webbe, Ph.D., a Florida sports psychologist and marathoner. "If a negative thought intrudes, immediately replace it with a positive thought. This is called "thought stopping". Think about what a beautiful day it is, how fit and healthy you are, or start a conversation with another runner/walker."

Webbe believes that mulling over your race plan is helpful, only if it doesn't add to your stress level. "Relaxation is so important, because stress wastes physical and emotional energy," he says.

### **Food:**

Eating on race morning is a balancing act. For short races, you might want to pass entirely. On the other hand, says Kristine Clark, "You don't want to be hungry on the starting line, even for a shorter race." She recommends a small, easily digestible, fiber-free meal at least two hours before the race. This mini-breakfast might be an energy bar, a bagel smeared with peanut butter, or white toast and a banana. If eating before a run is new to you, try this mini-breakfast a couple of times before a long training run to see how your system handles it.

### **Drink:**

Consume plenty of water or a sports drink on race morning. "Most sports drinks contain the three electrolytes - sodium, potassium, and chloride - that you need to replace what you lose in sweat," Clark says. "Drink at least 12 ounces in the last 20 minutes prior to the start of the race." If you normally have coffee for breakfast, that is fine. A new study on caffeine shows it isn't much of a diuretic after all. Other research shows it might even improve your endurance.

