

Chapter 1

Training for the Big Race: An Overview

In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering the reasons for running a marathon
 - ▶ Finding time to train for the marathon
 - ▶ Preparing for the marathon and anticipating challenges
 - ▶ Training with a group or training alone
 - ▶ Hiring a coach to help you train
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When Pierre de Coubertin from France founded the modern Olympic games that were first held in Athens, Greece, in 1896, he decided to include a long running race. Being the sentimental guy that he was, he named the race a *marathon* after the Greek town where the ancient Greek runner Pheidippides's legendary run began. Little did he know how popular his little footrace would become.

With nearly 500 marathons in the United States each year and half a million people running them, saying that running a marathon is a big deal is an understatement. It has become a popular item on people's bucket lists. It may even be on yours. Perhaps that's because people recognize the truth in what running philosopher George Sheehan once said: "The marathon is an adventure into the limits of the self, a theater for heroism, where the runner can do deeds of daring and greatness." And it gives you really nice legs!

Running a marathon is a huge undertaking. There's a lot to know after you decide to do it. Where do you begin? In this chapter, I give you an overview of running a marathon, including the expected time commitment to prepare for it, ways to get started, and potential challenges.

Why Run a Marathon?

Before you start preparing to run a marathon, you should know why you're doing it. After all, deciding to run a marathon isn't like deciding what to eat for dinner or what to order at your favorite coffee shop. It's a pretty big decision that requires commitment. So why you're doing it is an important first question to ask yourself. You may want to run a marathon for many reasons:

- ✔ **To get fit:** Training for a marathon is a great way to improve your aerobic fitness (not to mention get a great butt). Nothing gets you fit like running. Because running involves your whole body, it trains all your muscles. It also drives your heart rate up higher than any other activity, which is a powerful stimulus to improve your cardiovascular fitness.
- ✔ **To lose weight:** Running is one of the best ways to lose weight because it burns more calories than just about every other activity. And because training for a marathon means a whole lot of running, that's quite a lot of calories. Most people, even seasoned runners, drop at least a few pounds during marathon training.
- ✔ **To challenge yourself:** Humans often like to undertake difficult endeavors — to set tough goals and go after them. What better way to challenge yourself than to run 26.2 miles? Doing so is both a physical challenge and a test of your mental strength.
- ✔ **To accomplish something and improve your self-esteem:** Trying — and better yet, succeeding at — something you think is difficult feels good. It feeds your ego and makes you feel better about yourself. Even though running a marathon is becoming more popular, those who do it are still the minority.
- ✔ **To bond with your friends and family:** Running a marathon can be very social, as you and your friends and family can share the experience together. Many people train for and run marathons together. The support (and the shame factor when you flake out of a group training run) can provide a lot of motivation, and those long runs offer plenty of time to catch up with your fellow runners.
- ✔ **To raise money for charity:** Running a marathon is a great way to raise money for a good cause. When you run for charity, you're not just running for you anymore; you feel a measure of responsibility. You're running for kids with leukemia or for your mom with cancer. You're doing something good for yourself *and* others.
- ✔ **To assuage your midlife crisis:** Getting your mind off your age is actually a very common reason to run a marathon. Lots of

people make big decisions and like to shake things up a bit when they hit those milestone birthdays, like 40 or 50 (or 60 and beyond). Doing something challenging is a great distraction from those creeping anxieties about aging. The amazing benefit of running a marathon as a distraction is that it has the power to make you feel younger.

- ✓ **To cross it off your bucket list:** The marathon has become a popular bucket-list item, one of those things to do before you, well, kick the bucket. A lot of people want to experience the challenge of training for and running 26.2 miles just for the sake of doing it. It's right up there with skydiving (only safer).

Making the Time to Train for a Marathon

Some things you can do at the last minute, like picking up dinner at a fast-food restaurant, mailing your taxes on April 15, and sending your twin brother an e-card because you failed to remember his birthday until 9:54 p.m.

Didn't expect to see "training for a marathon" on that list, did you? I hope not; training for a marathon is a huge endeavor that normally takes months and that you need to take seriously. For many reasons, it's not something you can do (or should try to do) in a few weeks, and risk of injury is probably the major reason to take your time. The biggest risk of injury comes when you run too much too soon, before your bones, muscles, tendons, and ligaments are able to completely adapt. (I tell you more about common running injuries in Chapter 13.)

Great strides: The growth of the marathon

The marathon has grown faster than a bodybuilder on steroids. According to MarathonGuide.com, 299,000 people completed a marathon in the United States in 2000, growing to 503,000 in 2010. In 2000, 62.5 percent of marathoners were male, and 37.5 percent were female. In 2010, 58.8 percent were male, and 41.2 percent were female.

Many popular marathons are held in the United States, which hosted a whopping 483 of them in 2010. The largest marathon in the United States is the ING New York City Marathon, which boasted 44,704 finishers in 2010. The next five largest marathons (by number of finishers in 2010) are the Bank of America Chicago Marathon (36,159), the Boston Marathon (22,540), the LA Marathon (22,403), the Marine Corps Marathon (21,874), and the Honolulu Marathon (20,169).

The amount of time to prepare for a marathon varies from person to person, according to circumstances, goals, and a lot of other things, including

- ✔ Your prior running experience
- ✔ How many days per week you plan to run
- ✔ How quickly your body adapts to training and how much recovery time you need, which influence your risk of injuries
- ✔ How fast you want to run the marathon



If you're a new runner, I recommend running a few days per week for at least a year before running a marathon. Run some other races, like 5Ks and 10Ks, and work your way up to the half-marathon and marathon. That's the safest way to do it. The marathon requires maturity, in terms of both training and experience. Trying to run a marathon without first becoming a runner is like trying to earn a PhD without first earning a bachelor's degree. You increase the risk of injuries and of making training and racing mistakes.

The exact amount of time you need to train for a marathon depends on how long and how often you've been running:

- ✔ If you've been running up to 20 miles per week for at least a year but have never run a marathon before, give yourself eight to ten months to prepare for it.
- ✔ If you've been running for a few years and have run a marathon before, give yourself six to eight months to prepare.
- ✔ If you're one of those speedy types who runs every day, sleeps with your running shoes on, and makes running a marathon as much a habit as eating pasta and soaking your legs in cold water, give yourself enough time to fully recover from your last marathon and to ramp your mileage back up before attempting another one. Typically, that means about four to six months, especially if you want to run your next marathon faster.

Depending on your level and goals, you can run a marathon on 5 to 15 hours of training per week. That includes the (increasingly) long run you'll do each week.

Training for a marathon isn't just a time commitment for you; it's a time commitment for your family, too. So unless you're single with no responsibilities other than yourself, you need to let your family know how important running a marathon is to you so they can be supportive. Someone has to watch the kids when you're out running for three hours on Sunday morning!

How did the marathon become 26 miles, 385 yards, anyway?

Ever wonder how the marathon became the distance it is? Don't you wish it was shorter? The seemingly arbitrary distance of 26 miles, 385 yards (26.2 miles or 42.2 kilometers) has a long history. For the first modern Olympic games in 1896, the founder of the Olympics, Pierre de Coubertin, included a running race that was 25 miles (40 kilometers), approximately the distance of the legendary run that the ancient Greek soldier Pheidippides took from the Greek town of Marathon to Athens to announce the Greeks' victory over Persia in the Battle of Marathon. For the next couple of Olympics, the race distance was changed. In preparation for the 1908 Olympics in London, the International Olympic Committee and the British Olympic Association agreed to include a marathon of 25 miles. Logistical problems with the layout of the course caused organizers to revise it, which lengthened the route, as did plans to make the start line 700 yards from Queen Victoria's statue by Windsor Castle. Organizers planned for the runners to enter the Olympic stadium through the royal entrance, run one lap of the track and, at the request of the royal family, finish in front of the family's viewing box. This made the race 26 miles, 586 yards, and 2 feet. However, this distance was changed yet again after running a trial marathon before the Olympics, with the start line being moved to the private east terrace of Windsor Castle to avoid interference with the public at the start line, making the final distance 42.195 kilometers, or 26 miles, 385 yards. What a headache!

For the next Olympics in 1912, the length was changed to 25.0 miles (40.2 kilometers), and it was changed again for the 1920 Olympics to 26.56 miles (42.74 kilometers). In 1921, the International Amateur Athletics Federation (now the International Association of Athletics Federations), the international governing body of track and field, irrevocably fixed the marathon at the 1908 Olympic distance of 42.195 kilometers. And that's who we have to thank for that!



If running a marathon were easy, everyone would do it, and it wouldn't be a big deal. Anything worth accomplishing in life is difficult. Running a marathon is a huge undertaking, but it's also very rewarding. As you plan your schedule to prepare for your marathon, take your time and do it the right way.

Starting to Prepare for a Marathon

Assuming you've made the decision to run a marathon (which is why you're reading this book), how do you begin to prepare for it? Do you just go out and run 20 miles? No, please don't. Building up to that distance takes time. Here's what you need to do to start preparing:

- ✔ Read this book so you can find out as much as you can about training for the marathon.
- ✔ Get your head in the game. Many beginning runners are timid about running, but it's really not that hard — you start by putting on a pair of comfortable running shoes and going out the door to run, even if it's only for a few minutes. You'll huff and you'll puff and you may even blow your house down, but that's okay. Being out of shape turns into being in shape pretty quickly if you stick with it.
- ✔ Decide whether you're going to train on your own, with a group, or with a friend. (I discuss these options later in this chapter.)
- ✔ Make sure you have a good pair of running shoes — not the dusty pair of 10-year-old Converse sneakers sitting in the back of your closet. I tell you about choosing the equipment you need in Chapter 2.
- ✔ Tell your friends and family you're going to run a marathon. Your commitment to accomplish something is greater when you announce it to others who are important to you.
- ✔ Mark the marathon date on your calendar so it becomes something real rather than just an idea.
- ✔ Find a good training plan that progresses slowly and systematically. (I give them to you right here in this book, of course, and they're tailored to your running experience. Flip to Chapters 8, 9, and 10 to take a peek.)
- ✔ Learn proper running form. I teach you all about that in Chapter 4.
- ✔ Surround yourself with people who support your goals and with other runners. The energy and motivation that come from other runners is contagious.
- ✔ Evaluate your current fitness. Knowing where you are helps get you where you want to go. If you can run 13 miles, you're half-way to the marathon already. If you huff and puff after running three steps, you may want to spend a couple of months running and improving your fitness before training for a marathon.
- ✔ Check with your doctor. This sounds like one of those disclaimers you read in fitness magazines and other books on the subject, but getting checked out by your doctor is a good idea, especially if you have any existing medical issues or are over 40.
- ✔ Cut back on the alcohol. Alcohol dehydrates you, and with all the sweating you'll do, you need to hydrate as much as possible.



- ✔ Start eating better. Marathon training requires certain nutrients, like complex carbohydrates and protein, to recover after those long runs. So clean out your fridge and replace the processed food with fruits and vegetables, just like your mother told you. (You can keep the chocolate; the sugar in chocolate is good energy for your muscles.)
- ✔ Figure out safe places to run in all weather. If you're unfamiliar with your neighborhood, now's a good time to make sure that where you're planning to run is safe — from animals *and* humans.
- ✔ Start believing that you can run a marathon. Success always begins with a belief, no matter how small. So believe in yourself and your abilities and keep repeating to yourself, "I can do this."

Running through Basic Marathon Training Strategies

When it comes to running a marathon, there's more than one way to train. However, there are ways to train and then there are smart ways to train. Training must be systematic and progressive.

- ✔ *Systematic* means that the training isn't arbitrary, with a smattering of workouts here and there; that it doesn't include abrupt changes in mileage or intensity; and that each cycle of training builds on what came before so that the entire program is seamless.
- ✔ *Progressive* means that the training stress increases over time — the weekly mileage gets higher, the long runs get longer, and the workouts get faster. I've seen many runners run the same five-mile route day after day. Humans, and especially runners, are creatures of habit. They do the same thing over and over, and though they may not always expect a different result, they certainly hope for one. To improve your fitness and performance, your training must be progressive.

To train smart, you need to optimize your training and train at more effective levels of effort to get the best results. Smart training sets you up for success. Although you can achieve running success through many different paths, you can also train incorrectly.



For example, one of the biggest mistakes runners make is thinking that to run faster in races, they need to run faster in workouts. So they run their workouts faster than their current fitness level dictates. I once coached a college runner who ran around 19 minutes

for a cross-country 5K and told me she wanted to be trained like a 17:30 5K runner. So I told her to run a 17:30 5K and then I'd train her like a 17:30 5K runner.



Races, which tell you your current level of fitness, dictate your training pace, not the other way around. As a marathon runner, you don't do workouts to practice running faster. You do workouts to improve the physiological characteristics that enable you to run farther and hold a faster pace for longer (see Chapter 3 for details). Think of an assembly line: If you want to make more products, increasing the number of workers (physiological characteristics) so you have more assembly lines to do the work is a better strategy than increasing the speed at which the assembly line workers work. The goal of training is to obtain the greatest benefit while incurring the least amount of stress, so you should run as slow as you can to obtain the workout's desired goal. Running faster than you need to only increases fatigue without any extra benefit.

Because the marathon is *aerobic* — that is, the activity requires that your muscles use oxygen — your training should focus on your body's ability to use more oxygen. For most people, the key is the weekly mileage and long runs. Unless you're an advanced runner with years of running behind you, your marathon training program shouldn't include a lot of *interval training* — periods of faster running interspersed with short recovery intervals. Initially, your main focus is to become as aerobically developed as possible to improve your endurance. I talk about how to do that in Chapter 5.

As an experienced runner who wants to get better, your training matures, growing from a basic outline of mileage and long runs to more mileage, tempo runs that train you to hold a faster aerobic pace, and interval training to boost your speed (see Chapter 7 for more about interval training). You progress from higher volume and lower intensity to lower volume and higher intensity, although you must always pay attention to the volume of training given the importance of mileage for the marathon. If this sounds complicated, you're right, it is. Even if you've run a marathon before, it can be daunting. I tell you how to mix training components together in a training plan in Chapters 8, 9, and 10 (for beginners, intermediate runners, and advanced runners, respectively).



No plan is ingrained in stone. You must always leave room for adjustment based on things like how much time you have to train, how much recovery you need, how fatigued you are, and so on. For women, the ever-changing hormonal environment and menstrual cycle issues also come into play, so a woman's program should always be open to change.



Training is complicated, sure, but some basic concepts underlie a solid marathon training program. Here are a few basic, but very important, points of training:

- ✔ **Balance training with recovery.** All the adaptations you make that enable you to run farther and faster occur when you're not running, so take recovery as seriously as you take your training. I talk more about recovery in Chapter 12.
- ✔ **Mix up your paces.** If you run slow all the time, you'll just become a slow runner. Train using the whole continuum of paces, from very slow to very fast, to enhance both your endurance and your speed. I talk more about improving your speed in Chapter 7.
- ✔ **Respect the distance.** Twenty-six miles is a long way to run. Respect the distance by preparing adequately for it. Don't take a nonchalant approach to the marathon. Confidence comes from being prepared, so prepare yourself.
- ✔ **Run a lot.** There's no way around the fact that running a marathon requires a lot of preparation. Although you don't have to run more than 100 miles per week like the best marathon runners in the world, you still have to run a lot. Training is the key to running the marathon successfully. You must run at least a few times during the week in addition to your long run on the weekend.
- ✔ **Run long.** You need to do many long runs to prepare for the marathon. Your longest run should fall somewhere between 20 and 24 miles, or three to three and a half hours, whichever comes first. If you're an advanced runner, you may run longer than 24 miles before the marathon. I talk about long runs in Chapter 6.

As you train for your marathon, take a few risks, and gain strength and momentum from your running to help you see those risks through. Remember that though there may be a chance of failing, people take risks because the chance of failing makes success taste even sweeter.

Considering the Challenges of Marathon Preparation

Running a marathon takes a long time, even for those who do it extremely well. Because you'll be running for so long, you run into some challenges that don't play a major role in shorter races.

Coping with increased body temperature

The air temperature can dramatically change the way your body copes with all that running. When you run for a long period, your body temperature rises because your muscles produce heat when they contract. So when it's hot outside, your body temperature rises even more, sometimes to dangerous levels.

You naturally slow down when you experience increased body temperature, called *hyperthermia*. Blood flow to your active muscles decreases as more blood goes to your skin to help your body cool itself. Given a choice between maintaining a nine-minute-mile pace in the marathon and trying to lower your body temperature so you don't die of heat exhaustion, your body chooses the latter (and thank goodness for that).

The increase in body temperature also affects your cardiovascular system. Your heart rate drifts upward in an attempt to maintain *cardiac output* (the volume of blood your heart pumps each minute) and blood pressure. The increase in heart rate when your running pace hasn't increased is called *cardiac drift*.



As you might imagine, the combination of hyperthermia and cardiac drift is very stressful to your body. If the marathon is on a hot day, you need to train your body to handle that stress. A good way to do that is to run in hot weather. Integrate running in the heat slowly by going for some of your shorter runs (anything shorter than 10 miles) in the heat before attempting your longer runs. However, avoid running any distance in extremely high temperatures (more than 95 degrees) unless you're an experienced hot weather runner.

Maintaining your pace while your muscles lose fuel

A significant aim of your training is to teach your muscles to do a better job of using fuel so you can maintain your pace. Your muscles store carbohydrates that they use for fuel when you run. That stored fuel is called *glycogen*, which is a branched chain of glucose (sugar) molecules. You have enough stored glycogen in your muscles to last slightly more than two hours of sustained running at a moderate pace. So unless you run a marathon as fast as the best runners in the world, you're going to run out of fuel. When your muscles have no glycogen left, that's called *glycogen depletion*, and

that's no fun. Glycogen depletion and the accompanying low blood sugar coincide with hitting the infamous marathon wall — your legs feel heavy, you feel lethargic, and you want to stop running. So you want to delay glycogen depletion for as long as possible.

Running for long periods increases how much fuel your muscles store and also forces your muscles to rely more effectively on fat for fuel, which delays your muscles' use of carbohydrates. In Chapter 3, I tell you more about the elegant physiological adaptations that your body makes in its use of fuel when you run long — adaptations that help you maintain your pace in the marathon. In Chapter 6, I tell you more about fueling your long runs.

Avoiding dehydration

Water is the largest component of your body. It's vital for many chemical reactions that occur inside your cells, including the production of energy for muscle contraction. So when you lose water, you experience some harsh consequences. When you sweat a lot, you become dehydrated, which causes a decrease in blood volume, decreasing the amount of blood your heart pumps with each beat. Oxygen flow to your muscles is then compromised, and your pace slows. Dehydration also causes an increase in body temperature while you run. Running performance declines with only a 2 to 3 percent loss of body weight due to fluid loss.



Consuming fluids when you run can help delay dehydration. Because most runners lose water through sweating faster than what they can replace by drinking while they run, nearly every runner is dehydrated at the end of a marathon. Your goal is to delay dehydration for as long as possible. During your marathon, drink at every aid station.



You need to stay hydrated during training, too, because your level of hydration affects your workouts. Drink fluids that contain sodium, which stimulates your kidneys to retain water (see Chapter 6 for details). When you're not running, you can tell whether you're hydrated by the color of your urine (don't try to determine this while you're running). The lighter your urine, the more hydrated you are. Your urine should look like lemonade rather than apple juice.

Joining a Marathon Training Group

Most runners like to train with others. After all, humans are social animals. Group training can help you become a better runner

because pushing yourself is easier when someone is running right next to you. Group training also offers camaraderie, accountability, encouragement, motivation, and a network for information about all things running.

Before searching for a group to run with, decide which type of group you want to join. Many options are available, from small, informal groups that meet in front of a running shoe store and include runners of all levels to large, competitive, fee-based clubs that meet at a track for coach-led formal workouts and long runs, fully staffed with volunteers and aid stations.

With the marathon's growing popularity, many national and local marathon training groups exist to help you accomplish your marathon goal. Many large marathons, like the New York City Marathon and the Chicago Marathon, partner with national or local charity organizations that offer training programs and group training. Check the marathon's website for a list of participating charities.



The following national, coach-led groups have local chapters in nearly every major U.S. city. Check online for the chapter in your area:

- ✔ **Joints in Motion** (www.arthritis.org/joints-in-motion.php): A charity-based, 18- to 20-week program that raises money for the Arthritis Foundation.
- ✔ **Team Challenge** (www.ccteamchallenge.org): A charity-based, 16-week program that focuses on half-marathons and raises money for the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation.
- ✔ **Team In Training** (www.teamintraining.org): A charity-based, 16-week program that raises money for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.
- ✔ **USA Fit** (www.usafit.com): A fee-based, 24- to 28-week program.

Most formal marathon training groups offer the following:

- ✔ **Aid stations:** During long runs, volunteers typically hand out water, sports drinks, and carbohydrate gels so you stay hydrated and fueled.
- ✔ **Educational clinics:** Want to know which shoes to get or what to eat to fuel your muscles? How about some mental tricks for the marathon? Many groups offer clinics, usually held before or after the long run.
- ✔ **Mapped-out long runs:** Don't worry about getting lost on long runs. Groups provide you with a map and directions.

- ✔ **Pace groups:** Smaller groups based on your current abilities or goal marathon pace enable you to stick with other runners who run the same pace as you.
- ✔ **Snacks:** Many groups offer post-long run snacks to replenish all the carbohydrate you used during the run.
- ✔ **Training program:** Whether online or on paper, a plan that outlines your marathon preparation is standard issue for training groups.
- ✔ **T-shirt:** Oh, the coveted T-shirt! Runners collect running T-shirts like bees collect honey. And long gone are the days of cotton — you get to enjoy lightweight *technical T-shirts*, which are made of fancy fabric that wicks moisture away from your skin.



Do an online search or check with your local running shoe stores to find out about marathon training groups in your area.

Working with a Coach

If you've never run a marathon before and haven't been running for long, consider working with a coach. Although most running groups have coaches, you won't get the hands-on attention that you get with a personal coach. A knowledgeable coach is the greatest asset you can have as a runner. A coach designs a training program for you, monitors what you're doing, and motivates and inspires you to do things that you never thought possible. You see much better results with a coach than you do training on your own.

Having an outside pair of eyes is important. Wanting to challenge yourself is fantastic — it's one of the great opportunities of the marathon — but when you try to coach yourself, you're too close to your situation to see what's really going on. I've coached many runners who want to run even when they're sick because they don't want to lose fitness and feel guilty by missing a run. You need a coach who can see the whole picture and tell you when to push and when to back off and recover.



Check online to find a coach in your area. Some coaches write a training program for you that you can follow on your own, some coach you by e-mail, and some meet you for workouts. The choice comes down to how much hands-on guidance you want. Coaches range in price from \$50 to \$300 per month.

Just as when choosing other professionals for a service, make sure the coach has the proper credentials before hiring him. Most running coaches don't have any credentials other than being runners

themselves. Here are some factors to help you narrow down your choice of a coach:

- ✔ **Does the coach have an exercise science or related degree or a coaching certification?** You'd be surprised how many coaches don't have education in the field.
- ✔ **Is coaching the person's profession or does he do it as a hobby?** Although many coaches aren't full-time coaches, you want to work with someone who's at least serious about coaching and doesn't just do it as a hobby. Keep in mind that you're spending money on this person, just like you would for any other professional.
- ✔ **Do you feel comfortable with this person?** The final decision of whom you choose to coach you often comes down to how well you get along with him. If you don't feel comfortable talking to your coach, you're less likely to communicate with him, which hurts you in the long run. The more feedback you give your coach, the more he can help you. So you need to feel comfortable providing that feedback. Feel free to interview coaches before choosing one.



Don't underestimate the value of a good coach. A coach can be a trainer, motivator, teacher, and source of inspiration. He can guide you to achieve a level of success that's hard to obtain on your own.

Going It Alone (With the Help of This Book)

Much has been written about the loneliness of the long-distance runner. Through my hours alone on roads and trails, I've discovered how to become my own psychologist — how to “work in” rather than “work out.” Running gives you a chance to work through your personal issues and to search for answers. It may sound hokey, but the time spent running alone is a great chance to think, to problem-solve, to wonder what can be.

You don't have to train as part of a group or with a coach to run a marathon. Many people like running alone. Running alone for most of my adult life, I know firsthand its many advantages:

- ✔ **You can save time.** When I've been part of a school team or run with a group as an adult, I'm always amazed at how much time a run takes compared to running alone. Between driving to the group's location, the time waiting for everyone to gather, announcements, socializing, stretching, the post-run

socializing, and driving back home, a five-mile run that would take 40 or 45 minutes from your front door turns into almost two hours!

- ✔ **You determine your own schedule of when to run.** Want to run when you first get out of bed? How about after work? Or, perhaps, if you're like me and are lucky enough to work for yourself, whenever you want? Running alone gives you the flexibility of running at any time of the day. If the weather forecast calls for rain beginning in the evening (when most training groups meet during the week), you can change your schedule and run in the morning.
- ✔ **You can tune out the world.** When you run alone, you don't feel obligated to hold a conversation with someone else. You can listen to music, catch up on audiobooks, or listen to your favorite podcast.
- ✔ **You can run wherever and however fast you want.** Want to run at the beach or a nearby park? Okay! Want to change your route at the last minute? No problem! Feeling frisky and want to pick up the pace? Go for it! When you run alone, the possibilities are endless.
- ✔ **You can be alone.** Don't underestimate solitude. Running may give you the only chance you have all day to be alone with your thoughts and emotions. It can be an opportunity for meditation and for great exploration of who you are and what you want to become.



Training by yourself isn't all rosy, however. It also has major downsides, such as

- ✔ **The feel of being alone:** Training for a marathon is a big deal that requires a big commitment. Unless you don't mind running by yourself every day, you may feel lonely in the process.
- ✔ **The lack of accountability:** Left to their own devices, many people won't get out the door and run on a regular basis. The temptation not to run when you perceive other things getting in the way is always there. If you're one of those people who needs to be held accountable, training alone is not for you.
- ✔ **The lack of camaraderie:** When training alone, you're, well, alone. You have no one to talk to about how your training's going, brag to about your kid acing his history test, or complain to about your in-laws visiting for the weekend.
- ✔ **The lack of external motivation:** Training by yourself means the motivation to run has to come from within. You won't have a cheering squad on the side of the road, waiting for you to run by during your 20-miler, or even anyone to say, "Good job! You're looking great!"

If you choose to train for the marathon alone, I don't suggest you try to climb this mountain completely on your own. Everyone needs help to accomplish great things. That's why I've written this book. You have all the information you need right here between the two yellow-and-black covers, so use the information to guide you. May your marathon journey bring you memorable runs and the chance to become the runner and the person you want to be.