

# TRAINING FOR AN ULTRAMARATHON

Running more than 26.2 miles was once considered the realm of extreme athletes but a growing number of runners are taking on the challenge, and discovering that running 30 miles or more on trails can be easier than running a road marathon (be inspired by Richard's story on page 34). How is this possible and how do you go about training for one? Read on...

## 1 PRACTICE WALKING IN TRAINING

Yes, I know you are a runner but all but the elite ultrarunners employ a walk/run strategy during races and training. There are two main strategies and it depends on the terrain as to which is best; walking uphill, running downhill and flat sections works best for hilly terrain and running for a pre-determined time and then walking (eg run 15 minutes, walk five minutes) works best on the flat.

## 2 INCREASE YOUR LONG RUN

As with training for a marathon the long run is the most important training run for the ultrarunner. The difference is that ultrarunning is all about time spent on your feet, the distance covered is not that important. The ability to run 20 miles in training is considered necessary to do well in a marathon. There are no such rules in ultrarunning. If you can build up to regular three to four hour runs including some walking you should have enough endurance to finish up to at least a 50 mile ultra race.

## 3 RUN DOWNHILL

Running downhill increases leg strength and helps build resistance to the painful feeling in the upper thighs that you experience towards the end of a long race. Adding some downhill running sessions to your training where you walk up, then run down for one to three hours will prepare your legs for the demands of an ultra.

## 4 LEARN TO EAT AND RUN

RUNNING AN ULTRA REQUIRES A STEADY STREAM OF CALORIES TO KEEP THE BODY FUELLED. FOR MOST RUNNERS SPORTS DRINKS AND GELS MAY BE PALATABLE DURING A MARATHON BUT ANY LONGER AND THEY BEGIN TO MAKE YOU FEEL SICK. LEARNING WHAT YOUR STOMACH CAN, AND CAN'T, HANDLE CAN BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FINISHING OR NOT. EXPERIMENT IN TRAINING WITH DIFFERENT FOODS UNTIL YOU FIND SOMETHING THAT WORKS FOR YOU.

## 5 GET OFF ROAD

Trail running is by far the most popular form of ultrarunning. The chance to run 30, 40 or 50 miles through beautiful countryside on trails instead of pounding the pavements is one of the biggest attractions of ultras. Running on trails requires more from your ankles but less from everywhere else in your body. Spend as much time as possible off road to strengthen your ankles and the rest of your body will thank you.

## 6 RUN SLOWER

SPEED IS NOT AS MUCH OF A CONCERN IN AN ULTRA. ELITE ATHLETES MAY MANAGE EIGHT TO NINE MINUTE MILES BUT FOR MOST RUNNERS 10 MINUTE MILES OR SLOWER IS THE NORM. GET USED TO RUNNING SLOWLY IN TRAINING BY MAKING SURE YOUR LONG RUN IS DONE AT A VERY COMFORTABLE PACE.

## 7 MILEAGE

All the studies show that there is no correlation between your chance of finishing an ultra and your weekly mileage, so don't think that more miles is better. Your long run is far more important than your weekly mileage.

## 8 BACK TO BACK RUNS

If the thought of running for four hours is a bit too much then another way of preparing your legs for the demands of ultras is to do two medium distance runs on consecutive days. For example, run for two hours Friday night followed by a two hour run Saturday morning. This has a great training affect but places less stress on the body.

## 9 SMELL THE ROSES

Ultrarunning is not about shaving seconds of your personal best, it's about challenging yourself to run further than you think possible and just as importantly to enjoy yourself along the way. In training, don't obsess about distances, times and heart-rates, instead take notice of the sunrises, sunsets, and the scenery you pass through.

## 10 BELIEVE IT IS POSSIBLE

Ultrarunning is even more "mental" than marathon running, believe in yourself and don't listen to any voices that tell you otherwise.

Andy DuBois  
Andy is an elite ultramarathon runner and a qualified Personal Trainer and Exercise Coach [www.andydubois.blogspot.com](http://www.andydubois.blogspot.com), [andydubois@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:andydubois@hotmail.co.uk).