

STAY MARATHON-FIT!



Big event cancelled? Dr Bruce Paton of the Institute of Sport Exercise and Health* helps you maintain your running legs

Recent weeks have seen mass participation races such as the London Marathon postponed or cancelled due to lockdown. This has been disappointing for runners who've poured so many hours into training. So, if your event has been postponed, what can you do in the meantime to maintain your fitness levels and adapt your training routine?

1 STICK TO THE RULES

First and foremost, when you go for a run, pick a quiet location and time of day when there will be less people and traffic around. Run alone or with up to five companions and observe the two-metre distancing rule to avoid any possible transmission of coronavirus. If you or members of your household have symptoms you need to self-isolate.

2 INCREASE YOUR TRAINING

The Government's current advice allows you to exercise as much as you like, which is good news for marathon training, which typically ranges from two hours for elites and up to four or five hours for novice runners. If you've been doing shorter runs than usual due to previous guidelines, increasing the intensity of your runs beyond your anaerobic threshold (the running pace where your muscles change from working with sufficient oxygen, to working anaerobically) will help you to run for longer at faster speeds and increase your mile pace. Increasing your frequency, meanwhile, running more days each week, will help to maintain your weekly mileage. However, try to build up frequency and intensity, as well as distance, gradually, so your tissues have time to adapt to the increased loading.

3 SUPPLEMENT YOUR TRAINING

Home exercise to complement your running sessions can include a range of training, from high-intensity-interval



training (HIIT) to strength work. HIIT can be done at home on an exercise bike or a step, with short burst of maximal intensity repetitions and recovery periods. There's good evidence it can improve longer-distance time-trial performance with both strength and cardiovascular effects. Strength work and plyometric jump training can also be done indoors. For strength, focus on the muscles required for running, such as the gluteal, hip, hamstring, quadriceps, trunk and calf muscles. Integrate your indoor plyometric moves before or after running, gradually increasing the length of the sessions. This will let your legs experience fatigue as they would in a long run, or the last stages of a marathon.

4 FOCUS ON THE GOOD

Remember, although your race has been postponed, you're helping your community as a whole, and the pressure is off! Generally, your marathon place will be held for future, giving you more time to prepare. Use the time to improve your performance and speed, and address any strength deficits to reduce your risk of injury. It's easy to get stuck in a rut with fixed and repetitive programmes, particularly with the long, slow, distance work of marathon training. Use the lockdown time to be more creative with your training and learn about programme design, to keep your training fresh and prevent demotivation.

'Evidence shows HIIT can improve longer-distance time-trial performance'

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