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How Can I Train for a Half Marathon Only a Month Away?

By [Wendy Bumgardner](#), About.com Updated: November 13, 2008

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Question: How Can I Train for a Half Marathon Only a Month Away?

I haven't been training and the [Avon Walk for Breast Cancer](#) half marathon is only a month away. How can I train in the little time I have left?

Answer: The month before the half marathon, you need to concentrate on two things -- getting in your long training walks, and final shakedown of your gear, shoes, clothing, and snacks.



Photo © Wendy Bumgardner

Can You Make it to the Finish?

A half marathon is 13.1 miles or 21 kilometers. In my experience, if you are a fairly healthy person who has walked 6 miles (10K) at a time in the past month, you will be able to finish a half marathon. You may be walking with blisters the last four miles. If you aren't already walking for six miles (10K) at a time each week, I recommend switching to a shorter distance event (such as a 10K or 5K). A fairly healthy person should be able to [finish a 5K or 10K](#) distance with only a month of training (or even no training to speak of).

The Avon Walk for Breast Cancer is a forgiving walk -- you can catch a shuttle to the finish from several checkpoints. For a charity event, I don't recommend going past the point of pain. Take a ride if you are overheating or in pain from muscle strain or blisters.

Can You Make the Finish Time?

The most important consideration is whether you will reach the finish by the cutoff time. It is unethical, rude, and dangerous to enter an event where you know you won't be able to make it to the finish before their stated closing time. Walk event hosts close down water stops and open the course to traffic on a set schedule. If you are lagging, you upset the entire system and endanger yourself.

[How to Predict Your Half Marathon Finish Time](#)

The Longest Days

In the time you have left, you need to walk a long walk one day a week and walk for 30 to 60 minutes all other days of the week. Your first long walk should be 1 to 2 miles further than your usual workout walk. If you are completely untrained, aim for walking for 90 minutes to two hours for your first long walk, which should be a distance of 5 to 7 miles.

Each week, increase the distance of that long walk by another mile. If you experience no blisters or muscle strain, you may be able to do a hurry-up schedule and bump up the distance by 2 miles each week. But that brings more risk of developing blisters, which will take a few days to heal and can set you back.

Effects of Long Training Walks

These long days especially prepare your feet for the distance, as well as testing your mental game. You may discover blistering, chafing, or other irritation at longer distance that you don't at lesser distance. You may want to schedule a massage for the day after a long walk as your shoulders, back, and neck may be tense from the hours of being in one body position.

Speed

Pace training is of less importance vs. doing the distance. You may want to use the first 5K (3 miles) of your long day to pace yourself at your desired pace. But don't try to keep that up throughout your long training day.

Blisters

Your feet aren't used to the long mileage and you don't have time to slowly toughen them up. You will need to find the right recipe, quickly, to prevent foot blisters. First, switch to socks made of wicking fabric rather than cotton. Use a lubricant and/or corn starch on your feet to reduce friction and keep you feet dry.

[Seven Strategies to Prevent Blisters](#)

Half Marathon Shoes

Your shoes should have 80 to 150 miles on them, tops. You don't want to wear brand new shoes on the walk, but you don't want to wear dead shoes, either. It is best to start your half marathon shoes fresh the month before the half marathon, break them in at lower distances, and train in them for at least one of your longest walks.

Walking Gear

Every item you will wear during the walk should be worn during your long training days. Do not wear anything new, period, for the walk itself. This is your final chance to ensure that all items work well for you over long distance.

Walking Snacks and Sports Drink

It is critical to test your walking snacks and the actual sports drink variety being served at the event during your long training days. This is the time to discover whether you can tolerate sports energy gel or whether the sports drink they will distribute gives you stomach pains. Often the event will post what they are using on their website. If not, email or call the race director and ask.

[What and When to Drink on the Marathon](#)

[Marathon Energy Snacks](#)

Walking Companions

If you will be walking with a friend, it is best to train with that person on your long training days. Be open and honest with him/her about what sort of mutual support (or lack thereof) you will give and expect in return. Will you both stop at the portable toilet when one needs it? Will you split up if your paces are different? Will you both put on headphones and enjoy music rather than conversation? Come to an agreement in advance about what you will do when one is moving stronger than the other.

Train Right Next Time

To keep yourself on course, sign up for my email courses to train right for longer distance events. It's free and the weekly emails will nag you to get out the door and do your training before it is too late.

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Wendy Bumgardner

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