

Ep #272: Are You Ready to Train for a Half Marathon?



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jill Angie

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Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you've never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you are in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, your fat running coach. I help fat women over 40 to start running, feel confident, and change their lives. I have worked with thousands of women to help them achieve their running goals and now I want to help you.

Hey runners, how are you? How are you? It is fall here in Philadelphia, and this is my absolute favorite time of year. It is also the perfect season for running. It is perfect. Perfect. Especially when there is a pumpkin spice latte at the end of it.

Anyway, fall is also peak half marathon season and right now everyone is talking about their races. And I'm getting a lot of questions from new runners asking if they're ready to start training for their first half marathon. And I love answering that question so we're going to dive in today.

Now, in case you're wondering, a half marathon is 13.1 miles. It's basically you run a 5k and then you have to go another 10 miles to cross the finish line. I know that sounds far, and it is far, right, to be fair. But I promise it's totally possible for almost any runner.

And it's just a matter of doing the right kind of training, learning how to stick to your commitments, because there's going to be plenty of days when you don't feel like it and you're going to have to do it anyway. And also, getting yourself properly fueled, figuring out how you're going to fit the training into your schedule, and getting a self-care regimen in place that's going to keep your body in peak running form.

And training for a half marathon takes a few months, right? At least four months. And if you don't approach it the right way, you're going to end up injured or having a really shitty race day experience. And if you start training before you're ready, it's going to be even worse.

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So today we're going to dive into how to know when you are ready and then what you can expect during your training. Sound good? Okay. So how do you know when you're ready? Well, there's physical readiness and there is mental readiness. So we're going to start with the physical. And for a half marathon, this is kind of the upsetting news for some folks, I want you running for at least a year before you even start training for a half marathon, okay?

I want you building a consistent running base for a year. And in that like last couple of months before you start officially training for your half marathon, I want you to have done a 5k at least like 10 or 12 times. And that doesn't mean 10 or 12 5k races, okay? But that you have run three miles at least 10 to 12 times over the last couple of months before you start the training, okay?

And so that might mean that for the past month you've been running three miles three times a week, or you've done a 5k every weekend for the past couple of months. But either way, I want to make sure that your body is fully adapted to that three mile distance. That three miles like is your jam at this point. So physical readiness starts with building the base.

And then next if you're doing that, if you've built that base and you're doing those three mile runs, and you're doing them pretty consistently, I also want to make sure that they don't feel difficult, okay? So there's a difference between finishing three miles and being really achy and sore the next day and feeling like completely exhausted afterwards. And doing three miles and actually feeling pretty good afterwards, right?

So if you're going out for three mile runs and you're asking yourself, "Gosh, I hope I can finish it today," you are not ready to start training for a half marathon. But if you're doing a three mile run and at the end you're like, "I definitely could have gone farther. I wonder what it would feel like to go four

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miles.” Maybe you're even playing around with going four miles, then you're probably ready to start training for a half marathon.

Okay, that three miles needs to be a distance that feels really, really comfortable to you. Do not start training for a half until you get to that point. And to be fair too, I'm not saying that comfortable means that it's like easy peasy rainbows and daisies, right?

It's a distance and effort level that you feel confident about. You're not tired or sore after and you think yeah, I could totally keep going. That's what I mean by feeling comfortable with 5k distance, okay? And I want you to have done it many times before you start training for that half marathon.

And then the third thing, if you have any developing injuries like plantar fasciitis or some sort of pain in your hips or your knees, well training for a half marathon is going to aggravate that. So make sure you sort out your body before you increase your mileage or you're going to be really, really unhappy and you probably won't finish the training.

If something hurts at three miles, it is going to hurt more at six miles, and nine miles, and 13 miles. And pushing through the pain is never a good idea. So you got to get that shit figured out before you make it worse. You've got to make an appointment with a sports doc, get into physical therapy, start strength training and start stretching, okay? Oh, and if you need help with those last two things, the strength training and the stretching, just join Run Your Best Life and we will hook you up, all right?

But basically, physical readiness for a half marathon means you have a solid base of consistently running for a year or more. You've done a lot of three mile runs in recent history and they feel comfortable. And you don't have any developing injuries and you have a strength training routine in place. Okay, so those are the physical criteria.

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Now, I want to talk about the mental piece, and I addressed the physical piece first because frankly, that's the easy part. So the mental piece, I mean, you can be physically ready and not mentally ready. If your brain isn't in the right space, training is not going to be a fun experience and you might end up using the whole thing as a way to beat yourself up, right? You know, that inner bully will have a field day with it.

So if running three miles feels like an eternity right now, half marathon training is not a great idea for you, okay? If you are bored for that three miles, if you are complaining in your head the whole time, if you are thinking, "For fuck's sake, when is this going to be over?" for the whole three miles, I do not think half marathon training is a great idea for you because it's just going to be more of the same.

So you need to actually be enjoying that three mile run, that 5k before you decide to jump in and triple your running time, all right? Because if you're bored with 45 minutes or an hour, two to three to four hours is not going to be fun at all. And you're probably going to either avoid it or half ass it and then that's going to suck on race day. So that's like the one mental piece, like figure out a way to start enjoying running.

And again, that's something we talk about a lot in Run Your Best Life, is how to kind of have fun with it because some running is hard and sometimes yes, it can be a little bit boring. And when we tell ourselves stories about how we hate it, and how boring it is, and how we wish we were doing anything else, right, we are the opposite of motivated.

But if you're thinking about doing a half marathon, it's probably because you, on some level, like running. So you've got to start telling yourself a different story about that three minute run. Get to the point where you're looking forward to it, where you're enjoying it, and then you can leap to half marathon.

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Now, if you hate running, right, I know people who hate running and they still run because, I don't know, there's some sort of like self-loathing, punishment kind of thing going on. If you hate running but you want to do a half because you think you have something to prove, just don't do it. Figure out a different way to be a badass. I promise you, everyone's going to be happier.

Okay, so if you hate running, a half marathon is probably not your thing. If you like running but you tell yourself stories about it while you're doing it, we got to clean that up before you start half marathon training. If you love running, if you look forward to those three miles right now and that's your favorite part of the week, then by all means if you meet all the physical criteria we talked about, let's go.

Now, here are just some other thoughts, reasons that people sign up for half marathons. And I see this a lot in our community, is signing up for a half because all your friends are doing it and you don't want to be left out, okay? But again, you hate working out for more than an hour, you don't really like running or you don't like long distance, or you know, you don't like going more than an hour.

So if that's the case, right, all your friends are signed up for a half marathon, you don't want to be left out, but you really don't like working out for more than an hour. Don't sign up for the half marathon, okay? You're going to resent it. You're going to resent every step of the training, probably your friends, race day is going to suck.

A better idea is to offer to run some of the training runs with your friends. Like maybe your friend has a 10 mile training run and you say I'm going to show up I'm going to do the last two miles with you. And I'm going to be there on race day to cheer you on, to make funny race signs and to do all the supportive things, okay?

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But if you hate running or you don't like running for more than 45 minutes to an hour, even if your friends are doing it, half marathon is not a great idea for you. Get the picture? You've got to get your mind right before you sign up for that race.

So how do you get your mind right? I think this is like one of the questions I get asked a lot is, well, I don't know how to change my thinking. I think I'm just somebody who, you know, struggles with running and I don't know how to fix that. So we're going to talk about that next.

So asking yourself why you want to do it is really the way you get your mind right, okay? You've got to make sure that that reason that you want to do a half marathon, your reason for committing to this major thing is rock solid, all right? If your reason is because all my friends are doing it, that is not a rock solid reason, okay?

If your reason is because I think I'm supposed to, also not a rock solid reason, okay? And if it's not solid, those hours and hours of training are going to be like a weight around your neck dragging you down. You're going to start to resent running in general, you're going to want to quit, and I don't want that for you, okay?

So here are some examples of reasons that will get you through the training, if they resonate with you, if they're things that you believe in, that'll get you through the training and across the finish line. So first of all, if you love running so much that you want to do it all the time. Like you just think about it when you're not running. When your three miles is over, you're sad, you can't wait to get out there and do it again. When you see somebody else running, you're like, "Oh, I wish I was them." Right?

If you love running so much that you want to do it all the time, then half marathon training might be a great idea for you. It's also a great idea if you want to see what you're capable of, okay? Not because you think it's the

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next thing on the list, right? Oh, well, if I do a 5k, then I have to do a 10k, and then I have to do a half marathon.

No, if you're just like, "I want to see what I'm capable of, I want to see what my body can do." A half marathon is a great challenge for the body and mind. And you are going to be really, really proud of yourself when you're done. All right, so if you like feeling proud of yourself, and most of us do, and you're up for a challenge and you're willing to be kind of uncomfortable throughout the process of achieving that challenge, half marathon is probably a great idea for you.

If you are bound and determined to train for a full marathon someday, well a half marathon is the first step. So you got to get that one under your belt before you move on to a full marathon. So yes, half marathon training is for you.

If you are committed to stepping outside your comfort zone to see if you can change your story about yourself, all right? And this is a big one because a lot of fat women, when they start running, they actually have to rewrite the stories they tell themselves about themselves and their bodies because running is something that we're taught that like is not for fat people. It's just not, right?

And so if you've spent your whole life thinking, "Oh, I'm fat and I'm not allowed to run, or I'm not supposed to run, or running is going to be too hard for me or it's going to destroy my knees, right? If you have bought into those stories and you want to train for a half marathon, that's a disconnect. That's a disconnect. So you're going to have to change your story about yourself. And often we do that by starting to run and doing some 5ks.

And if you're like, okay, now I've mastered that 5k level, I want to see what other stories I can change about myself, or I want to see how far I can take

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this, and you're committed to being a little uncomfortable. Again, half marathon might be a great idea for you.

Now, you might love running and you've been doing the three mile distance and you're like, "This is really fun, I enjoy this. And everybody keeps talking about distance running and I just want to see what all the fuss is about," then yeah, a half marathon might be an awesome next step for you.

Sometimes we can't imagine ourselves doing something because we just don't understand how cool it is. We're like, "Why would you do that again? Why would you put yourself through all that training just for a free banana?" Right? And then you do it and you're like, "Oh my gosh, I totally get it." Okay?

So you're like, "I don't understand why everybody's so excited about this. I want to find out and I'm comfortable with 5k, I've got the time, my body is in great shape, then let's go, let's see what happens. And I can tell you, if you're a runner, finishing that first half marathon is a huge rush of confidence.

Okay, so we've just talked about a whole slew of reasons that might be solid foundations for you to start training for that half marathon. Now I also want to give you some like, let's call this a pros and cons list. We've gone through the pros, let's talk about the cons. Because, again, a half marathon is a big investment of your time, it's going to take a toll on your body. So I want to make sure that you're ready to rock and roll before you start the training.

So if you love running but you hate running alone and you don't have any running partners who are willing to train for the same race with you, you're going to have to figure that out, okay? And so if you currently have running buddies for like two and three mile runs, that's great. But if they're all like,

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“Fuck no, I'm not going to do a half marathon,” right, you're going to have to figure it out.

So it might be joining a local running group. It might be recruiting your various running buddies to run parts of your long training runs with you. Maybe somebody runs the first two miles, and then you run another two miles alone, and then somebody else comes in for another two miles, you can figure that out logistically.

You don't necessarily need to have somebody with you the whole time. I have tons of clients who have their spouse, their friends, or their kids come out and do a couple miles at the end or in the middle so they have something to look forward to.

Joining an online community, like Run Your Best Life can also help with that because we have, this is so cool, we have members who run alone but they'll stop every few miles to do a quick video in our Facebook community, or make an accountability post so they feel connected, or they'll ask friends to text them while they're out running so they kind of can, you know, like get a text from people like, “Oh, you're doing great.”

So there are ways around that but you got to think that through ahead of time. So if you are not a solo runner and you don't want to become a solo runner, like we got to figure out the logistics of how you're going to make that happen.

Okay, this next con, this next food for thought might be a little bit of tough love for some of you. So if you think a half marathon is going to help you lose weight and that is the main reason you're doing it, you're going to be disappointed. So really think that through ahead of time because most of the time people training for long distance races either stay the same weight or they gain weight, okay?

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And I'm not going to go into the science of it, but half marathon training is a terrible weight loss plan. So if you've got that in the back of your mind that you're like, "Well, I'm going to train for this half marathon so I can drop 20 pounds," it's not going to happen, girl. It's just not.

So make sure that that's not your primary motivator because if you start working your way through the training, and yeah, maybe you do lose a little bit of weight in the beginning. But then as you start working through the training you start gaining weight, it starts to become frustrating and overwhelming and disappointing, and you're going to be angry, and it's going to affect your running, okay?

So really, really have a heart to heart with yourself about that before you move forward. Now, if you're not in this for the weight loss, which I'm all in for that, that's not a problem for you, go ahead. Carry on with your bad self.

All right, now, if one of your reasons that you want to do a half marathon is to make somebody else happy, right? Like, oh, I'm doing this because so and so needs someone to train with, or I'm doing this because my spouse thinks it's a good idea. Please don't do it because you're not responsible for anyone else's feelings.

And if your only reason to train for that half marathon is because somebody else says, "I'll be so happy if you do this for me," you're going to be miserable, right? Make sure you want to do it for yourself also. Now, if someone else benefits from that, right, if your husband is like, "I want to train for this half marathon, do you want to train with me?" And you're like, "Actually, that kind of sounds like fun," then that's awesome.

But if he wants you to train for a half marathon to keep him company and so that he's happy and you're like, "I do not want to do this." Don't do it, you're allowed to say no. Okay, you are allowed to say no.

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And honestly, if you are kind of training against your will, if you're training for a half marathon and you don't want to be there and you don't want to do it, you're going to be miserable and whoever you're doing it for is going to be miserable as well. I promise you're going to bring them down with you. So just avoid the whole thing.

Now, if you legit don't have time to train, it's not time to do a half marathon. And most people actually do have the time to train but they think they don't or they're not willing to prioritize running over other things. But be realistic, right? You're going to need to have three, maybe even four hours, like every other weekend for at least the last two months of training.

And if you truly do not have that time or if you know that you are not willing to give that time up to running instead of something else, a half marathon is not for you, you will need to put in those hours once a week for your long run. And then you're also going to have to run at least two other times per week plus do strength training the rest of the time, okay?

So a half marathon is not like, "Oh, that's going to be fun. Maybe every once in a while I'll go out and I'll run and see what happens." Like you have to dedicate many hours to this, okay? And you got to be realistic with yourself and think it through ahead of time.

And it's totally doable, like I said, most people actually do have the time to train, but they think they don't or they're not willing to prioritize that running over something else. So you got to take, just take a look at your calendar and be like, will I be able to, you know, for the last two months of training spend three and then up to four hours on a weekend dedicated to my training?

And do I have the time to run at least twice more during the week and strength training? So think that through before you sign up for that half

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marathon, especially if you're signing up for that half marathon to make somebody else happy, right? It's going to be a double whammy.

And then finally, I want you to be brutally realistic about your current situation. So let's say the race that you want to do is in a month and you've never gone more than six miles. Wait for another race, okay? You cannot fast track your training like you can cram for an exam. Do not underestimate the need for proper training, okay?

Half marathon training for a beginner is a four month process, and that is after you've built the base that we talked about earlier, okay? So if you're a brand new runner and you've been running for three months, do not sign up for a half marathon unless it's at least a year away, okay?

I don't want you to get hurt, I don't want you to just be super uncomfortable and possibly injure yourself unnecessarily, right? If you build that base and kind of suss out any body issues that you might have during that year, then when you start training for a half marathon you'll be prepared. Your body will be ready. But if you try to jump into it too soon without that base, without that strength and that just kind of like muscle memory, you're going to be sorry, okay?

So, the other thing I want to talk about is training plans. So you're going to need a solid training plan that sort of eases you up in mileage. And I get so many people coming to me saying, "Okay, well, I'm going to run seven miles this week, eight miles next week, nine miles the next week," right? And they're just like, every week they're just adding mileage on and adding mileage on. And then they're wondering why they're tired, why their body hurts all the time, why they're starting to get injured.

So you want a training plan that's going to ease you up slowly, especially if this is your first half marathon, right? If you did a half marathon 10 years ago, by the way, and you haven't really been running for 10 years and

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you're coming back to it, I want you to treat it like it's your first half marathon, okay?

So a solid training plan is going to ease you up in mileage, that's going to give you a long run and then the following weekend you're going to back off, right, you're going to run less. And then you're going to edge it up a little bit, another mile the following week, and then you're going to back it down, okay?

So there's no winging it. There's no randomly running here and there without a systematic approach. There's no like, every week I'm just going to run more than the week before, right? All of that is pretty much a guarantee that you're going to fail or get injured. So find yourself an appropriate plan and follow that motherfucker like it's your Bible, okay?

Get a coach who is experienced with training runners with your body type, okay? If you are a fat woman, you want a coach who is experienced with training fat women, who is not going to show up and be like, "Here's your diet plan," right? And then have you run way more mileage then suddenly, you know, she's like, okay, you were doing three miles, we're going to have you train for five miles and then seven miles. And like next thing you know, it's half marathon day and you're totally unprepared, okay?

So get yourself a coach who is experienced training runners with your body type, all right? We actually have quite a few of them in Run Your Best Life, shameless plug.

And then finally, half marathon training takes time, and planning, and commitment. You've probably already gathered that from everything I've talked about, I feel like this whole episode is me trying to convince you not to train for a half marathon. And that's the exact opposite of what I'm trying to accomplish here.

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I want you to be prepared for what you're taking on, okay? Because you can do it. I know you can do it, I believe in you. I just want to make sure that you're setting yourself up for success so that you have an amazing experience.

So half marathon training takes time and planning and commitment. You're going to need a support system around you. And that might be your family, it might be your friends, your coach, a training group, an online group, okay? But you're going to need a support system. You do not try this on your own. Make sure at least somebody is there to help you work your way through it, okay?

So make sure that you've got your support group in place before you take the plunge to sign up for your first half. And again, Run Your Best Life is a great support group, hint, hint.

Okay, that was a lot. I know I just gave you a lot of reasons not to do a half marathon, but if you're listening to this podcast I know that you're either thinking about half marathons, or thinking about becoming a runner and maybe a half marathon someday. I don't know, maybe you're just bored in the car. But my guess is that you are either ready or close to ready to start thinking about it, right? And you might even have one in mind. And you're like, "Am I ready? Is it time? Or do I need to wait?"

So okay, if you're like, "Hey, Jill, I've listened to this whole thing, you have not deterred me. I've met all the criteria. I'm physically ready. I'm mentally ready. I'm ready to train, where do I go from here?" That's the easy part. You just pick a race, find a training plan, and just go all in on doing it, okay?

But before you sign up for anything, right, think about this, if you could guarantee your success by doing just one thing, would you do it? If you were like, I know that doing this one thing is going to make my chances of success skyrocket, if you knew there was something out there that could

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make it pretty much inevitable that you would not just only finish your first half marathon, but actually have fun the entire way, all the way through the training right down to crossing that finish line. Would you do it?

I mean, duh, obviously, you would do it. And I have that thing for you. I've mentioned it a few times already in this podcast, it's called Run Your Best Life. And Run Your Best Life is a training program where you have multiple coaches to help you train. You have a fantastic community of women to support you, and endless resources to help you solve every problem and up-level your life along the way.

Now, you may have heard that Run Your Best Life is only open a few times a year for new members and that you have to take my Up and Running class first. And yes, that was true in the past. But I'm going to try something new for the rest of 2022. We're just going to roll with it, see how it goes. I'm opening Run Your Best Life up to the public.

And when I say public, I don't mean everyone, I mean just the women. So if you're a man listening to this, I love you, but you are not welcome in this space. This is just for the women. But I am opening it up to the public. So there's no longer a prerequisite to joining Run Your Best Life, you can just hop right in right now.

And the reason why is because I want to make it as easy as possible for fat women to start running. And I realized that having everyone go through a 30 day class first before they join Run Your Best Life was kind of doing the exact opposite, I was making it more complicated. And so I'm removing the complication.

And that is really good news for everybody because if you've wanted to join Run Your Best Life, but you didn't really want to take a beginner class, you can hop right in right now and we'll help you train for that half marathon, okay? And if you've wanted to join Run Your Best Life and you keep

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missing the open dates for Up and Running and you're like frustrated, boom, no problem. You can hop right in right now, okay?

So all the details are over at runyourbestlife.com and I really hope I'm going to see you there because I see a half marathon in your future. I do. I'm envisioning it right now. I'm envisioning you crossing the finish line. And I hope you're envisioning that for yourself as well. And Run Your Best Life can definitely help you out with that. So get on in, my friend, runyourbestlife.com, I hope I see you there.

Okay, my friends, I also hope today was helpful for you. And, of course, if you loved the episode, please share it on Instagram and as always, I love you stay safe, and get your ass out there and run.

Real quick before you go, if you enjoyed this episode you have got to check out Run Your Best Life. It's my monthly coaching program where you will learn exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you have always wanted to be. Head on over to runyourbestlife.com to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.