

Jog on It's like Linford
said, you just need
positive mental attitude

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Running start

Whether you're a regular runner or can't run to the corner shop without collapsing, here's how to get marathon-fit

Even the sweltering conditions of last year's London Marathon weren't enough to discourage another 35,000 strong-willed/insane applicants from drudging the 26-mile course this April. The race is an everyman's Everest, attracting novices and seasoned athletes alike, all willing to endure bleeding nipples, missing toenails and an incessant case of the runs. It's not all fun and games though: there's the long-term damage, stress fractures, nausea and exercise-induced insomnia too.

According to Bud Baldaro, the UK Athletics National Marathon Coach and Adidas Running Consultant "It's definitely worth having an MOT with your doctor before you sign up for a marathon. But if you are sensible about your training, progress gradually and set realistic goals there shouldn't be any long-term risks".

A fortunate few will have a genetic predisposition to run long distances with less physical stress than others. The Kalenjin runners of western Kenya, for example. ➔

WORDS AHMED ZAMBARAKJI

have long limbs, an ability to maintain a low heart rate at high altitudes and can convert oxygen into energy more efficiently than your average Joe (collectively they have won nearly half of the international men's running prizes). The vast majority of Brits on the other hand, can barely make it to the corner shop for a Mars Bar and packet of Marlboro reds without collapsing into a wheezing mound.

It is this group in particular who have a million more reasons to run a marathon than the record-breakers or athletes. The catch is, novices don't have personal trainers or degrees in sports science and 70% will, at some point, sustain an injury serious enough to stop them in their tracks. So it's worth getting the following basics right – from the kit you buy to the goals you set – instead of burning yourself out within the first month.

GET OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT

While *Arena* would advocate Prada moccasins for most occasions, you're shopping to accommodate biomechanic anomalies here, not fashion. Richard Sinnerton, an orthopaedic consultant at the London Clinic, says, "When you run, an impact equivalent of four or five times your body weight is going through your leg and it has to be absorbed". With that in mind, always go to a specialist running shop for a fitting; the patently incorrect advice and faulty or sub par models we've found available on the high street will turn you into a cripple faster than you can say 'private healthcare'. Pro Feet (profeet.co.uk) use video gait analysis (essentially a camcorder pointed at a treadmill) and cutting-edge foot scanning technology to assess your running style and custom-fit an insole in the correct shoe.

THE LONG RUN

In order to start training for the big day, you need to be able to run up to four miles without passing out. "If you've just bought your first pair of running shoes and intend to run a marathon in three months, forget about it and sign up next year," says Baldaro.

If you're already in a fit state to start training, make sure you put together an educated program. In the '70s, the consensus was that running six days a week (preferably in some silky high-cut shorts and a headband) would get you in shape for a marathon. Today, training is all about moderation and variation (of intensity, time and distance).

So the ideal training schedule should incorporate four varied runs a week, one of which is the all-important 'long run'. "Long runs are the key to success", says Baldaro. "Running for a long period of time at 75% of your maximum heart rate is absolutely essential to building endurance. A marathon is a long war of attrition: your body needs to learn how to spend a long time on its feet while your mind learns to cope with the emotional and psychological demands."

In order to come up with a training schedule, start by finding out how long you can go before you burn out and then increase the distance of your long run by 10% every two weeks. Take a break from long runs every fourth week to let your body recover, and aim to clock up 15 miles in one session no later than two weeks before the big day.

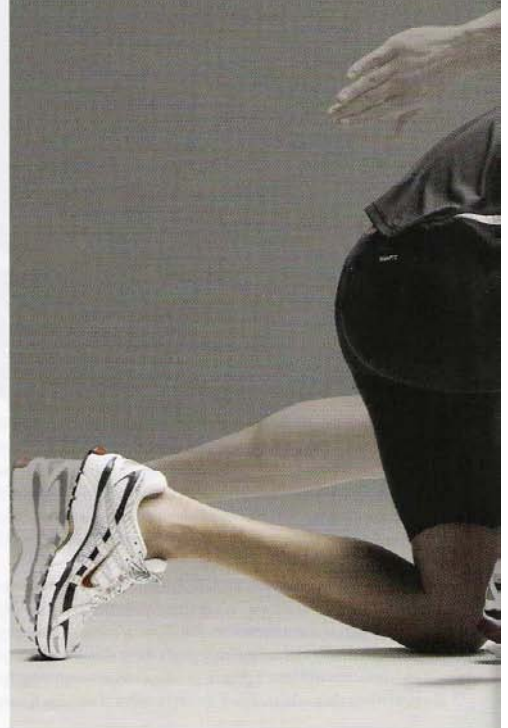
"Interval training is a superb way of teaching your body to cope with the physical demands", says Baldaro. Alternate bouts of fast, high-intensity running with 'recovery' jogs or walks to fine-tune your cardiovascular system. Recent research shows that, in order to improve aerobic fitness, the ideal ratio for interval training is three minutes' hard work to two minutes' recovery.

OVER THE WALL

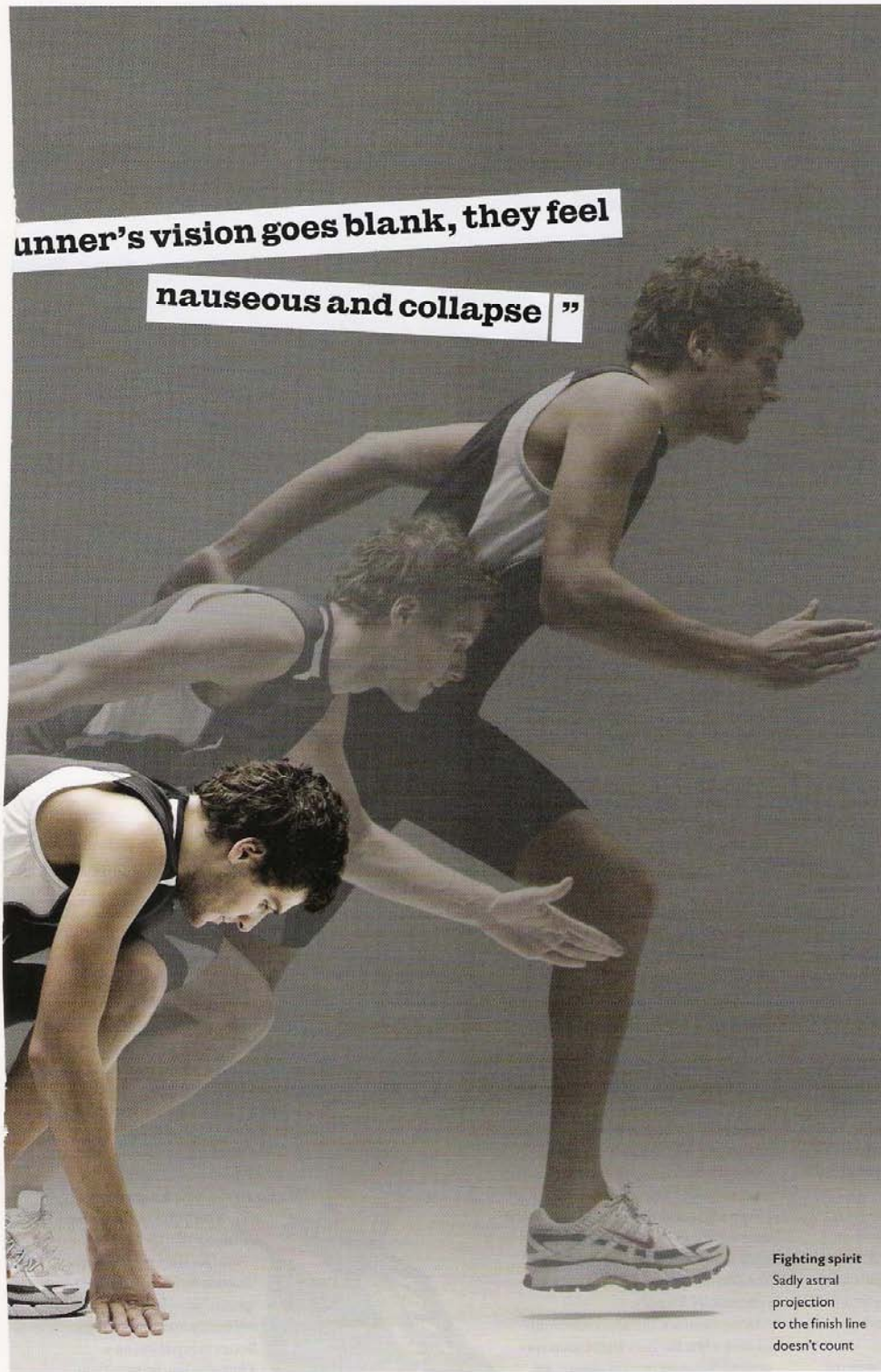
Hitting the infamous 'wall' (bizarrely the same analogy used in rehab clinics for recovering gakk heads) feels like the ground beneath you has given way. You've seen it on telly: in severe cases, a runner's body goes into 'shutdown' mode, their vision goes blank, they feel nauseous and are reduced to a hobble before eventually collapsing. This is because they've used up their glycogen reserves and their body is fuelling itself on fatty acids. The best way to avoid hitting the wall is to gorge on carbs at every meal and drink glucose, carb and electrolyte-rich sports drinks during exercise. Don't set off at full speed, either, or you'll be done by the 15-mile mark. You need to conserve plenty of energy for those challenging last few miles, when you're most likely to hit 'the wall'.

Even if you do manage to dodge the dreaded wall, that doesn't mean your body gets off scot-free. Training will compress the spinal vertebrae to the point where you'll lose about 2cm in height (you'll get it back eventually) and, according to the *Journal Of Applied Physiology*, you'll sweat out 2-3 kg of body fluid. Nice.

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unner's vision goes blank, they feel
nauseous and collapse ”



Fighting spirit
Sadly astral
projection
to the finish line
doesn't count

ESSENTIAL RUNNING KIT

*You'll feel obliged to
go out for a run once
you've shelled out
for this little lot*



Garmin Forerunner 305

A heart-rate monitor, training computer and GPS receiver rolled into one. And the backtrack feature is ideal when you've wound up somewhere off the M40 after a long run. garmin.com



Nike Amp+

Designed as a remote for your Nike+ sports kit (sold separately), you can control your iPod playlists, monitor your time, distance and pace as well as check the time on an 'invisible' LED display. £60; nike.com



Sennheiser PMX 70 Sports Headphones

These sweatproof single-cable headphones will stay in place on even the most hard-footed runner. £30; sennheiser.co.uk