

MIND OVER MARATHON

MENTAL STRATEGIES TO HELP YOU COVER THE DISTANCE

If it's your first time running 3, 13 or 26 miles, it can be challenging both physically and mentally. Even after completing all your training runs, making it to the race site well-rested and healthy, arriving in anything but the proper state of mind can have devastating effects on your overall performance. Use your weekly training runs to train both physically and mentally. Come race day you will find yourself well prepared to do your best. Relax and have fun, enjoy every moment, you deserve it! To be successful in your race, here are some mental strategies to help you cover the distance.

No surprise, set goals! For most first timers, goal setting is easy: to finish! For runners with more aggressive aspirations, consider breaking this goal into 3 parts.

- 1) An easily obtainable goal
(to finish strong and under 4 hours)
- 2) A realistic yet moderately challenging goal
(to run a 3:45)
- 3) An ultimate goal
(to set a personal best and run 3:30 or better)

Train for #3, but be flexible enough to accept #2 or #1.

Get on the course. If it is logistically possible, train on the marathon course. Do some of your training runs on the same roads you will cover on race day. Break the course into small segments and use this time to get a feel for the surface, observe landmarks and gather mental pictures of the course. If you can't physically be on the roads, be sure to review online maps and plan to arrive a day or two ahead of time to drive the course.

Visualize. Use images gained in your training to visualize yourself running through each mile marker for the event in which you are running. Visualize the start line, the spectators, the runners, important landmarks and most importantly the finish line with the clock displaying the time you are shooting for.

Imagine. Use mental imagery to see yourself as a great runner. Imagine running smooth and efficient, effortlessly and relaxed, and full of energy. Mental imagery can be performed as a dress rehearsal for your big day. Dream big – imagine yourself on the podium, winning your age group or setting a new personal record!

Journal. During your training you may want to document your distance, time, weight and average heart rate. Why not take the time after your run to document your thoughts? When training gets tough, your distance gets longer, you encounter a hill or turn into a headwind, you're dehydrated or your nutrition is off. Take time to debrief after your run to journal these negative thoughts. "At mile 8, I always seem to think..." or "I hate hills, so when I see one coming I always think..." Document these negative thoughts and develop a strategy to combat them. "Head winds make me a stronger runner," "I eat hills for breakfast," or "I know at mile 8 I am going to feel cruddy so I am prepared for this." By journaling your thoughts, you will document your challenges, be able to anticipate and prepare for negative thoughts so that you can laugh at them on race day.

Positive self talk. You have experienced negative thoughts during your training and have probably developed strategies to combat them. Keep thinking and saying positive thoughts to yourself. Develop a mantra to keep you moving forward such as "run strong," "slow and steady," or "I can do this." Think it, say it and believe it.

Find your reason for running. Some people run for fitness or health, to control or lose weight, or just for fun. If running just to run is not enough to motivate you, try finding a cause to support. Many runners choose to challenge themselves in support of a friend or loved one with an illness. Some people choose to run for others that wished they could run, but can't. Why do you run?