

Training Document:

Tips for Speedy and Efficient Half Marathon Recovery

by Jenny Hadfield

Half-Marathon Recovery

Half Marathon recovery begins the minute you cross the finish line on race day. The key to efficient recovery and minimizing post run aches, pains and injuries is to begin the recovery process the minute you cross the finish line.

Take 10 minutes and keep moving with easy walking. Walking at an easy pace allows the body to come down more gradually and circulates blood back to normal distribution quantities and regions on your body (i.e. stomach for digestion...). It prevents fainting and blood pooling in the legs that occurs if you immediately sit down post race. It also allows your body to process the lactic acid that builds up during the race.

Within the first few minutes consume a sports drink like Gatorade Endurance to increase blood sugar levels and replenish electrolyte levels in your system (sodium, potassium). Eating salty foods like pretzels will also boost electrolyte levels.

Within the first 30 minutes post race, eat a meal rich in carbohydrates and a little lean protein and low in fat. This will replenish the glycogen stores depleted in the race as well as provide protein to rebuild muscle tissue damage. Consuming fuel post-race is vital for an efficient recovery process. Delayed post race fueling can result in adding days to the recovery process. There is a short window of opportunity post race within 60-90 minutes that the body is very receptive to fuel absorption. Like a dry sponge soaking up water, your muscles will refuel quickly and use the fuel to begin healing.

Consuming carbohydrates with protein replenishes glycogen faster. For example, a bowl of rice with chicken or cereal with milk would provide the ratio of carbohydrates to protein. Many times, it is not possible to eat due to a decrease in appetite. In this case, you can bring a Recovery Drink like Clif Recovery or EAS or Powerbar Recovery Drink that has a mix of carbohydrates and protein and when mixed with water is the optimal way to consume nutrients quickly without having to eat.

Continue eating carbohydrate-rich foods for the next two days post race to adequately replace depleted glycogen stores.

Within 2 hours of finishing the race, soak your body (hips and legs) in a cold tub. Fill with lukewarm water, get in with your rubber ducky and then add ice cubes. Normal post race swelling will decrease in cold water and speed recovery. This sounds awful but is highly effective in recovery strategies. It is the first thing most professional athletes do post game (pitchers in baseball) or race.

It is safe to take anti-inflammatory products like Advil 3+ hours post race when your body is replenished with glycogen and fluid levels. Avoid taking them during or immediately after the race or long runs. These products will help reduce inflammation and pain related to stiffness.

Continue hydrating throughout the day to replenish fluid losses.

Use the "Pee" test to monitor adequate hydration levels. If your urine is pale yellow you are adequately hydrated.

Schedule a massage 3+ hours post race or the next day. Massages too soon to finishing the run can create more soreness. Massage can have a dramatic effect on recovery times.

Take a 20 minute nap 2-4 hours after eating. Your body at rest will absorb more readily the food in your stomach and speed healing.

Pay attention to aches and pains post race. Most aches and pains will subside in 48-72 hours. In most cases, the time off will allow the aches to heal. If they stick around for a week or more or grow worse, schedule an appointment with a physical therapist or orthopedic doctor. It is better to be safe than sorry.

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Take one week off running and let your body heal. Although the stiffness subsides in a few days, there is still internal healing happening and running too soon increases the chance of an injury down the road. Cross-train easy for 20-30 minutes during the week and focus on flexibility. The general rule of thumb is to take one day for every mile to run easy and not race. Meaning, take 26 days of easy running before racing or running hard again. Gradually increase your mileage similar to a reverse taper.

Rest is an important component to the training and recovery process. Within the first week post race, rest days allow your body to refuel rather than burn glycogen. You aren't being lazy taking rest days, it is all part of the cycle of training and racing successfully and without injury. Think of it as investing in your future performance.

Cross-training activities play a major role in the first few weeks of race recovery. They allow you to increase circulation to the healing muscles without the pounding on the muscles, tendons and joints. Stick with activities that are low in impact like cycling, swimming, yoga and keep the intensity low to moderate.

Listen to your body and let aches and pains be your guide. If things hurt, give it a little more healing time. Every race is different and every recovery process is as well.

Keep a detailed log of your recovery process so you can develop a recovery recipe that works for you.