

Pacing Tips

Whether you're aiming to finish at the front of the race, the middle of the pack, or just get round the course in one piece, you will find that the best way to run as fast as you can is to try to run at an even pace throughout.

By definition, that means that the first mile and last mile of your run will take the same time, but the difference in effort between the two will be considerable, even though you'll be running at the same speed.

The slow down that many suffer in a long distance races (known as the "fade") is almost always as a result of poor pacing. Too fast at the start, followed by an inevitable drop in speed as the miles build up. In any half marathon, the average "fade" across the whole field between the first and second half of the race, is usually between 10-12%. That can mean a loss of ten minutes or more as a result of a badly executed race plan.

A well run half marathon however, doesn't need to be a near death experience. Run it evenly, and you'll find that you overtake dozens, or even hundreds, of other runners as everyone around you slows down while you are charging through the field at a steady rate.

So, how to ensure that you're the one doing the overtaking?

Firstly, you need to have a pre-race plan. Turning up on the start line and hoping to just start running "and see how it goes" is a recipe for disaster. You need to start with a realistic target time, based on your training and ideally previous races over shorter distances. This will give you a target to aim at and a pace per mile to start running at. Making it up as you go along, rarely leads to an enjoyable run.

Once you've started, you need to be prepared to run your own race. Not someone else's. Don't let your ego get in the way and lead you to throw your pre-race plan out the window. You have no idea how fit or fast the people around you are, and if you start racing other runners who you think you should be quicker than just because they are older or bigger than you, then you could end up being embarrassed. Some guys don't like being overtaken by women. Get over it. There will be women in the race quicker than you, and the guy dressed as Batman might just be a top club athlete having a laugh and raising money for charity.

In the early miles, think of the the race as a tide. At first the tide goes out. Have confidence that the majority of runners start too fast. They will be heading out in front of you. Let them go. In the middle of the race, the tide will be still and you'll be running at the same speed as those around you. It's in the closing miles when the tide comes back in. That means that all those who hared off at the beginning start to come back towards you. As you overtake them all, you can be confident that you've got your pacing just right.

How fast should you be running? Well, your training and any previous 5k or 10k race will give you an indication of what sort of time you are capable of. If you're still not sure, then try asking yourself this question every mile; "Can I keep this pace going until the end?" If the answer is no, then you really need to slow down. If the answer is yes, then you can probably afford to speed up a little. To run the race to the best of your ability, the answer should really be "maybe". You are probably stronger than your mind is telling you. Don't worry about the discomfort. It shouldn't be easy. If it was, then everyone would be doing it.

Finally, you can always follow the pacer. All the pacers are experienced runners who set out to run the entire race at an even pace. Stick with the pacer bearing the flag closest to your own target time, and let them worry about splits times and mid-race adjustments. They'll get you to the finish line just under your target, and you don't have to pay anything to them for the service!

We use Pace Pockets (www.pacepockets.run) to help us keep accurate timings throughout the course. You can get your own Pace Pocket for your specific target time for only £6.

Pacers at the Royal Parks Foundation Half Marathon are supplied by Xempo (www.xempo.co.uk), who supply specialist running wear that is uniquely printed with your race time. You can follow them on twitter using the following handles: @xempouk, @racepacing,