

Back to Back Marathons

By Marie Williamson

I have completed quite a few marathons. Some slow. Some not as slow. Some comfortably & some not very pretty (I was a mess!!). I wouldn't say I was a good runner. I'd even sometimes question if I was a runner. Imposter syndrome kicks in at many a start line.

Anyway... back in 2013, when I was in Ambleside for the Brathay Windermere marathon for the first time, I spotted some people running the day before the event. They looked appalling & I wondered what they were doing. I discovered that they were competing in the Brathay 10in10. From then on, it was a goal of mine to do that one day. That was in 2013 & only my 6th marathon.

At the time, I worked in a school & our holidays never coincided with the week I'd need off to take part in the event. So it gave me plenty of time to get lots of marathon experience in the years before I was able to take part. In that time I built up my annual marathon totals but there was at least a week in between. Not on consecutive days.

Six months before my 10in10, I took part in the Grim 4x4. A marathon each day for 4 days. I ended up injured on day 3 so day 4 was excruciating. The lesson to take from that was to work out how to stay injury free, for as long as possible, for 10 days. Luckily, we had a brilliant support team to help & guide us through the journey & I knew I had to do everything I could to get myself fit & ready for the challenge.

Being prepare meant more than just being able to run the distance. I actually did some strength exercises regularly (something I would normally ignore). There were 5 different exercises that I used.

1: Glute monster walk....I bought resistance bands & walked up & down my kitchen, whilst brewing up, with them stretched between my feet.

2: Eccentric calf lowering. Standing with the balls of my feet on the stair with my heels hanging off. Concentrating on lowering slowly to strengthen my calf muscles.

3: Squat jumps. Bloody knacker!!

4: sit squats. Feet flat on the floor trying to keep them pointing forwards & squat right down & hold for as long as possible. I could only manage a few seconds at first but could stay in this position for ages eventually.

5: couch stretch. Probably not actually called that but I don't know its real name!!

I vowed to keep them up afterwards...!!

I also did yoga several times each week, as well as pilates, body conditioning classes, cycling & swimming. I think work was a good strengthening workout too. Pulling heavy pallets, lifting, crouching & stretching. My stealth training.

I also added 10 days of running into my plan. Not often but following the odd marathon, I'd continue to run for the next 9 days. Some days may have only been 2 miles but it was about getting myself used to feeling what it would be like going out again & again & again. Funnily enough, after the initial protests, your body just does it.

So, my body was prepared. What about my mind? I truly believe that your frame of mind plays a major part in any event & how things go on the day (or 10 days). Yoga & meditation was a good

starting place for getting myself mentally prepared & I spent a fair bit of time convincing myself I could do it. I spent even more time ignoring the enormity of it all. I also sought & took advice from previous runners. The key points that I took on board...

"One day at a time, one box at a time (our drink/nutrition were to be kept in plastic boxes at several points around the course for us) one mile at a time, one step at a time."

And my favourite..."find a pace where you feel like you can keep it up all day & stick with it."

I, personally, don't think that it's a time to race when you have to get up & go again the next day. But I do know runners that have blasted out some brilliant times on consecutive days. They were the ones that seemed to get injured earlier on though, if I remember rightly.

I'm aware I haven't mentioned fuelling myself yet. I've learnt over time that pre-hydrating is very important to marathon running, as well as drinking during the run. I normally tend to carb load for 3 days prior to a marathon & eat mostly protein straight afterwards, & the following day, for recovery. One of my many worries was staying fuelled & hydrated enough for going out again the next day...& the next. & how could I carb load & eat for recovery? Again, with my marathon experience, I knew what foods work for me during a run. I tend to eat date bars, medjool dates & salty nuts. Would eating dates so much be a problem?!? Hmmmm!!! Something else to worry about! I decided to go with my usual & deal with any consequences and to just eat whatever I felt like for mealtimes. Just getting in enough calories to keep me fuelled would have to be my method &, hopefully, refuelling & recovery would just happen.

Each day went pretty much the same....

Eat, massage, warm up & stretch, yoga, run, eat, massage, swim, eat, sleep.

...& I managed the first 7 without injury. Day 8 saw me getting tears in my quads resulting in the last 2 days being quite painful.

I did write a little blog at the time, which you can read, if you're interested...

<https://mariesadventures.home.blog/2019/05/10/pootle-round-the-puddle-part-1/>

<https://mariesadventures.home.blog/2019/05/30/pootle-round-the-puddle-part-2/>