



*Half Marathon Training:  
Walkers*  
by Hal Higdon

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# Walking your first Half Marathon

Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	Rest	30 min easy	20 min stroll	30 min easy	Rest	30 min stroll	3 m easy
2	Rest	30 min easy	20 min stroll	30 min easy	Rest	30 min stroll	4 m easy
3	Rest	35 min easy	20 min stroll	35 min easy	Rest	20 min stroll	2 m brisk
4	Rest	35 min easy	25 min stroll	35 min easy	Rest	40 min stroll	5 m easy
5	Rest	35 min easy	25 min stroll	35 min easy	Rest	40 min stroll	6 m easy
6	Rest	40 min easy	25 min stroll	40 min easy	Rest	30 min stroll	4 m brisk
7	Rest	40 min easy	25 min stroll	40 min easy	Rest	50 min stroll	7 m easy
8	Rest	40 min easy	25 min stroll	40 min easy	Rest	50 min stroll	8 m easy
9	Rest	45 min	30 min stroll	45 min easy	Rest	30 min stroll	6 m brisk

		easy					
<b>10</b>	Rest	45 min easy	30 min stroll	45 min easy	Rest	60 min stroll	9 m easy
<b>11</b>	Rest	45 min easy	30 min stroll	45 min easy	30 min easy	60 min stroll	10 m easy
<b>12</b>	Rest	30 min easy	20 min stroll	30 min stroll	Rest	Rest	<b>Half Marathon</b>

[Click here for a printer-friendly version of the Walkers Schedule.](#)

MOST MAJOR HALF MARATHONS ARE FOR RUNNERS--but walkers can do them too. One advantage of a half marathon over a full marathon is that you won't need to spend as much time on the course. Most reasonably fit individuals should be able to walk 13.1 miles in around four hours. Doing so is fun. It is also exciting to set goals and achieve them. But before starting to train for a race that long, assess your fitness level. Realistically: can you do it? The following 12-week walking program assumes you currently have the ability to walk for 30 minutes, three to four times a week. If that seems difficult, consider going a shorter distance--or take more time to develop an endurance base. And if you are over age 35, you probably should see your doctor for a physical examination. But assuming no major problems, most healthy people can train themselves to walk and finish a half marathon.

The secret is consistency. Make walking a regular habit--a *daily* habit, not just something you do on the weekends or when the weather is nice. Mark Fenton states: "The fitness walker must make a positive commitment to exercise a certain number of days a week over a specific distance or length of time, even if some of those days show fairly modest efforts." Fenton is a former competitive racewalker and member of the US National Team. The following walking program was designed with his assistance.

The program lasts 12 weeks and begins at a fairly easy level. In Week 1, you walk only a half hour on most weekdays. Two days are for rest. One day on the weekend, you stroll at an easy pace. The other weekend workout features a prescribed distance: 3 miles the first weekend. As the program continues, the weekday walks gradually increase to a maximum of 45 minutes. The weekend walks also lengthen to a maximum 10 miles in Week 11, the week before the half marathon. Because the increases are gradual, you should be able to accommodate them without excessive strain. You *will* become a fitness walker and achieve an ability to complete a 13.1-mile walking event.

Before starting my 12-week program, let's consider some of the terms used. The terms used in the training schedule are somewhat obvious, but let me explain what I mean anyway. Further information and explanations are included in my [InterActive Training Programs available through TrainingPeaks](#), where I send you daily emails telling you what to run and how to train.

**Pace:** Don't worry too much about how fast you walk during most of your regular workouts--at least for the first few weeks. Walk at a comfortable pace. If you're training with a friend, the two of you should be able to hold a conversation. If you can't do that,

you're walking too fast. But change of pace can be an important training tool as your fitness begins to increase. You don't need to walk at the same pace day after day. In fact, you *should* change paces if you want to increase your fitness and improve your ability to go the distance. Here are descriptions of three pace changes prescribed in the program.

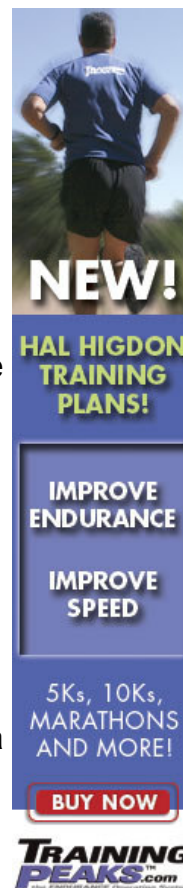
Pace	Description	Breathing	How to do it
Stroll	"Window shopping" walking	Normal	Enjoy your walk
Easy	Continuous comfortable walking	Almost normal	Move somewhat faster
Brisk	Walking with real purpose	Harder, but still conversational	Quicker-than-normal steps

**Distance:** Most of the workouts are prescribed in *minutes* rather than miles. Don't worry how far you walk; just walk for the prescribed length of time. If you know about how fast you walk (see below), you can estimate distance, but during the week, distance is not important. You just want to get out on a regular basis and exercise your legs. On Sundays, however, the training schedule does dictate workouts at distances, from 3 to 10 miles. Don't worry about walking *precisely* those distances, but you should come close. Pick a course through the neighborhood, or in some scenic area where you think you might enjoy walking. Then measure the course either by car or bicycle. Or you can purchase a GPS watch like the Garmin Forerunner, which uses satellite technology to accurately measure your pace and distance and record your heart rate. In deciding where to train, talk to other walkers or runners. They probably can point you to some accurately measured courses for your workouts.

**Time:** Comparing time and distance sometimes can be a trap. If you become fixated on how fast you walk, you can push yourself too hard and increase your risk of injury. But it's handy to know *about* how fast you are walking, particularly if you are worried about finishing the half marathon in less than four hours. To get a precise measurement of your ability, go to a track for an occasional workout. Outdoor tracks at colleges and high schools are generally 400 meters long. Two laps (800 meters) walked in the inside lane is about a half mile; four laps (1600 meters) is just short of a mile. If you don't want to do a full workout going in circles, schedule a walk near a track and slip in the gate for a few laps to see how fast you're going.

**Rest:** Rest is as important a part of your training as the workouts. You will be able to do the long walks on the weekends better--and limit your risk of injury--if you rest before, and rest after.

**Long Walks:** The key to getting ready to finish a half marathon is the long walk, progressively increasing in distance each weekend. Over a period of 12 weeks, your longest walk will increase from 3 to 10 miles. Don't worry about making the final jump from 10 miles in practice to 13.1 miles in the race. Inspiration will carry you to the finish line, particularly if you taper the final week. The schedule below suggests doing your



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long runs on Sundays, but you can do them Saturdays, or any other convenient day, as long as you are consistent. (See "Juggling," below.)

**Cross-Train:** As a variation, you may want to substitute some other activities on different days of the week. Runners usually refer to this as "cross-training." What form of cross-training works best for a fitness walker? It could be swimming, cycling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, or even some combination that could include [stretching](#) or [strength training](#) in a gym. The type of cross-training you select, should you choose to go that route, depends on your personal preference. Don't make the mistake of cross-training too vigorously.

**Jogging:** One way to get to the finish line faster is to do some jogging. If you were a competitive racewalker, you could get disqualified for starting to run, but since you are not competing for a prize, feel free to jog occasionally, either in training or in the half marathon itself. Jog in small segments: Fifty to 100 meters every 10 minutes or so might be enough at first. Eventually you might want to expand your jogging segments, or even run the entire way, but don't do too much at first. Running is more a high-impact exercise than walking, so be cautious. Your goal should be to finish the half marathon, not finish it fast. (If you do plan to do some jog/walking in a race that offers prizes in a "walking" category, you need to enter in the "running" division. It's unfair to those who walk the whole way for you to finish faster because you ran.)

**Take Time:** Does the 12-week progression from 3 to 13.1 miles seem too tough? Do you have more than a dozen weeks before your half marathon event? Lengthen the schedule; take 18 or even 24 weeks to prepare. Repeat the week just completed before moving up to the next level. Don't be afraid to insert "stepback" weeks, where you actually cut your distance every second or third week to gather forces for the next push upward. This training schedule is not carved in stone. Feel free to innovate if you feel you need more time to prepare.

**Juggling:** It's also possible to juggle the workouts from day to day and week to week. If you have an important business meeting on Thursday, do the Thursday workout on Wednesday instead. If your family is going to be on vacation one week when you will have more or less time to train, adjust the schedule accordingly. Be consistent with your training, and the overall details won't matter.

**Books on Walking:** For more information on walking, check out Mark Fenton's *The Complete Guide to Walking for Health, Weight Loss and Fitness*, recently published by Lyons Press. Fenton also collaborated with me to produce a chapter on walking for [Hal Higdon's How To Train](#). The schedule that follows is based partly on material from that chapter. Another book you might want to consider is my best-selling [Marathon: The Ultimate Training Guide](#). Although written with runners in mind, a lot of the tips and information on being an endurance athlete make sense for walkers too.

**InterActive Training:** For further instruction and motivation, sign up for my *InterActive Half Marathon Walking Program*, available through TrainingPeaks. Each day I will send you a daily e-mail message telling you what to train that day along with additional information related to health and fitness. You can also record your workouts in a computer log. [Click here for more information on Hal Higdon's Half Marathon Walking Program.](#)

Walking 13.1 miles is not easy. If it were easy, there would be little challenge to an event such as the half marathon. Whether you plan your Half as a singular accomplishment or as a stepping stone to the even more challenging full marathon (running or walking), crossing the finish line will give you a feeling of great accomplishment. Good luck with your training.

**--Hal Higdon**

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