

About this guide

This guide has been designed to help a non-runner / complete beginner to feel comfortable with running and improve their confidence to run outside. The hardest part about any fitness programme is the getting started and this guide will guide you step by step to completing the Coventry Half Marathon. If you follow this programme 100%, this will only take twelve weeks.

Congratulations on making a positive change to your health and lifestyle, it will be worth it.

Getting Started

If you can walk without pain you **will** be able to complete the Coventry Half Marathon 2010. The key to achieving any goal is planning and support. This blog will provide advice and a plan for you to follow to make completing the Coventry (or any for that matter) Half Marathon a realistic goal.

I have placed a section on my community website for the half marathon; in this area you can ask for advice, chat with others who have the same goal, swap running routes and offer support and advice to each other.

Here's the link:

<http://achievecoventry.ning.com/>

I must point out that it is important to consult with your GP or medical professional if you are new to exercise or haven't run before.

What qualifies me to give this advice?

I have been a full-time personal trainer and lifestyle coach in Coventry for over 12 years. I have helped literally hundreds of people achieve their lifestyle and fitness goals during this time, including; the London Marathon, the Great North Run, the Coventry Half Marathon, triathlons, mountain climbs, long distance cycle rides and many charity events.

I have helped people who had never run before complete half marathons and enjoy them; you get an amazing sense of achievement crossing the finish line. It is not important to focus on a specific time to finish in, if this is your first half marathon, but to get around without injury and with enjoyment.

Equipment

Before we get into the details of the exercise, I will give some advice to those of you who have never ventured out on to the streets to run before. Running is quite a cheap form of exercise to take up, although like with all sports, it is possible to spend hundreds on accessories. Most of us have a pair of shorts and a t-shirt that will be sufficient to get started; but will be necessary to upgrade as you start to up the miles.

What may be necessary to buy is a good pair of running shoes; they can be expensive but will make your training much more comfortable and can prevent injury. Looking around many 'sports' shops recently I have noticed that many fashion trainers have been labelled as suitable for running, this is not the case and they do not provide the support or cushioning necessary. A little time and effort is all that is needed to find the best type of shoe will suit you.

Go to a specialist running store, allow some time for this, as you may need to try on many different types and styles. Specialist shoe stores can be more expensive but it is worth the extra money to get the right shoe to start out with; you can then shop online for the same shoe next time. The expert at the shop should spend some time looking at the shape and arch of your foot to determine the best style for you.

Many stores now have complimentary running analysis, where they will observe how your foot strikes and rolls; you may overpronate - roll inwards, or supinate - roll outwards. This will alter the shoe that will be suitable for you.

If you develop blisters quickly or have any foot pain in the first week, you may not have the correct shoe. Most specialist running shops will exchange them for another shoe to make sure you get the right one for you; this is another advantage of using experts.

Pick the shoe that they recommend, don't ignore their advice because you like the colour or style of another pair, remember the wrong type of shoe leads to injury. Running shoes should be replaced every 3-500 miles.

It is also important to wear suitable socks for running; many are available now that increase your comfort. I had a friend who suffered from terrible blisters which caused him constant pain because he was wearing ski socks because it was cold. Specialist running socks make a massive difference particularly when upping the mileage.

<http://www.buysocks.com> is a great resource for socks for all activities and offers some great advice for the first time runner.

Accessories

I'm a gadget lover and it is easy to spend hundreds of pounds on accessories for running. You can buy heart rate monitors (can be useful, but not necessary), gps distance and training tools (as above), apple and nike have joined forces to create the nike+ running tool for the ipod (my wife has this and it is brilliant).

A training journal can be useful, but a notebook does exactly the same job; record your distance, time it took, how you felt and weather conditions.

There are many apps available for the iPhone which measure your distance and keep a log online; I have just started using <http://www.mapmyrun.com>.

Running can be boring if you have to venture out on your own, so an mp3 player of some sort is useful and you can pick music to help focus your pace.

One of the best running accessories you can have is someone to run with; a training partner provides motivation and when you set a time to run you will not want to let each other down, so if you're interested in starting running try to get a friend or relative to join you.

If you have a dog and it is good on the lead or you have open fields near, take it with you; I have two dogs and they love to go out running and they are great company on longer distance runs.

I have put links to my favourite running gadgets on the Achieve Bootcamp website: <http://www.achievebootcamp.co.uk/coventryhalfmarathon.html>

Running Technique

Running should be smooth, relaxed and have a natural rhythm, the better your running technique the less stress you place on your body and you will reduce your risk of injury.

Here are a few pointers to an efficient running stride:

- Keep a good upright posture; do not tilt forward from your hips, lean slightly forward from your ankles.
- Relax your shoulders without rounding them, keep them square.
- Let your arms swing naturally at your sides; focus on pushing your elbows backwards.
- Don't let your arms cross the centre line of your chest in front of you; this will lead you to hunch and round your shoulders.
- Don't over stretch your legs as you swing through, this can lead to a braking effect as your heel hits the ground, slowing you down and jarring your joints.
- Focus on pulling your heel underneath your body and striking the floor under not ahead of your body.
- As your heel makes contact, focus on rolling across your foot and pushing off from your toes.
- Try not to bounce; you're aiming to propel your body forward not upward.
- Look where you are going not down at your feet, this will help keep your body upright and you will see any obstacles ahead.

The more efficient your stride the easier the run will be; I have a friend who lands with his foot almost side ways like Charlie Chaplin, his fitness makes up for his inefficient stride but his performance rockets when he focuses on good technique.

The more efficient your running style the faster you can go with less effort. Running becomes more enjoyable as you improve your efficiency because you will flow and seem to float along rather than struggling to drag your feet along with you.

Measuring Intensity

The way we are going to measure your intensity is using the rate of perceived exertion (RPE), I prefer to use a simple scale from 1-10. When beginning any new programme it is important to build gradually and not to try and push for world record times in your first week. We are aiming to set the intensity at a level that is challenging enough to reach our 10k goal, but not so hard to make us feel like our hearts will explode and our legs fall off.

The levels will vary slightly depending upon the distance or time being aimed for; that is, a level 9 for 6 miles, would feel very different to a level 9 over 200m. Here is a guideline to each level:

1. Chilling out and eating cake.
2. Taking a casual stroll around the park, you could carry on all day.
3. Strolling with purpose, breathing a little harder.
4. Feeling good, maybe sweating a little, you can still hold a conversation.
5. Starting to work, sweating a little more, talking still comfortable.
6. Good work rate, feeling slightly breathless, but can still talk.
7. Struggling to hold a conversation, underarm taps have been turned on.
8. Breathing heavily, the effort you would put in if a dog* were chasing you.
9. Breathing very heavily, it's a big dog with big teeth, heart may explode.
10. Struggling to breath, it's a pack of dogs; your legs might fall off.

*I love dogs and training your dog to run with you can be a great motivational tool. I use this example because everybody remembers being chased by a dog when they were young, if it happened or not.

Most of the initial training will be around the 4-6 level to get your body used to performing exercise.