

Second Wind Running Club

Tips for Running Road Races by Joe Bails

The most important thing to remember: Relax and enjoy the race. Your goal should be to cross the finish line and to have fun.

Race Preparation

It is important to get enough sleep the days prior to a race and regular sleeping habits are important as too little sleep can possibly lead to injuries or illness. It is recommended to get up at least a couple of hours before the race, and maybe do some loosening up, followed by a breakfast a little lighter than normal, and lots of water. You can stop drinking about 1 hour before the race. New foods should not be tested close to a race, because it could upset your stomach. It is also important to be well hydrated before a race.

Tapering is important for all runners who compete at any race distance. You should taper at least the week prior to a shorter race, by gradually decreasing mileage and intensity.

Start a slow warm-up about 30 minutes or so before the race, and run for about 5-10 minutes. Then do some stretching and jog a little again. Relax and go to the bathroom well ahead of the race. The warmer it is, the less you need to warm up for the race because your core body temperature is already slightly elevated and ready to go. Warm up in your warm up clothing and slowly peel down as you get warmer. Warming up should also give you an idea of the amount of clothing necessary for the run. If the temperature is moderate to cool, you should feel chilly after removing your warm-ups. If you are comfortable, you either are wearing too many clothes or will need to deal with hot weather running.

Things you should know about the race include:

- The start and finish; stay close to the start line during your warm-up; knowing where the finish is helps you decide when you could start your strong finish.
- The race course, to include turn around points and aid stations.
- How long it takes to get to the race and how long it takes to find a parking place.
- The locations of the bathrooms at the start and along the course.
- The place to leave and retrieve your warm-ups.
- The location of aid stations and the types of aid available.
- The place to meet your family or friends after the event.

Race Numbers

Pin your race number to the **front of the singlet or shirt** you plan to wear in the race. Pin it on as early as the night before if you have picked up your number early. This way, you will make certain that you have enough pins and that you won't forget the number when you go to the start. Many races use your number to announce your name as you finish, so you want to be sure it can be read.

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The Right Stuff

The best way to avoid arriving at a race without your race number, proper clothing or even running shoes is to have a checklist of all the items you may need for a race. The checklist below was developed using years of racing experience. Use this list to pack for an event and to make certain that you have remembered to take everything you need.

Race Checklist

- Shoes & orthotics (if necessary)
- Socks
- Shorts
- Underwear
- Singlet/Tank-top
- Shirt, short or long sleeved
- Running Tights
- Jacket (either wind or warm-up)
- Pants (either wind or warm-up)
- Gloves or Mittens
- Sun glasses
- Hat or Visor
- Towel
- Fanny pack/Aid to be carried or placed on the course
- Watch/Heart Rate Monitor
- Race Number (if picked up early) & safety pins
- Race Chip (for chip timed, bigger races – not very many of these in our area)
- Course Map/Race Instructions
- Band-Aids/Athletic tape
- Vaseline
- Change of clothes for afterwards
- Deodorant
- Sunscreen
- Pre-race food and fluids
- Post-race food and fluids
- Ballpoint pen
- Money

Pre-race Anxiety

At any race, runners exhibit a lot of nervous energy before the start. It shows up as loud excited talking, inability to stay still, and long lines at the porta-potties. The bigger the race the more nervous energy runners have. Pulse rates reach near performance levels as people stand motionless at the starting line. How do you cope with this?

The first step is to realize that it is happening. The second step is to relax and to try to save all that energy for the race. Have a plan for what you will do at the start. It should include fluid drinking, warming up, a toilet break, stowing your warm ups and getting to your starting position. If you arrive early, instead of getting caught up in the anxiety, sit back and enjoy watching others do foolish things and waste their energy. Drink some water. Use your warm-up to relieve some of your nervous energy and try to stay focused on your pre-race plans.

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The Race

Start near the middle of the street. Runners will flow more smoothly from this position and there are fewer hazards (e.g. parked cars, spectators etc.). Relax the last few minutes in your starting location. As you run the race you can stay under control, confident that you know what is to come and how you are going to finish.

Pacing

Having a reasonable pace goal and being able to judge and maintain pace are crucial for successful racing. There are 3 ways to pace a race:

- Positive Splits - Go out faster than the average pace and hold on. Positive splits in a race are painful and rarely result in best performances. Yet many runners who lack self control at the start of a race are seduced into this pacing. They believe they should go out fast because they will slow down at the finish. You would only use positive pacing as a racing tactic if you are stronger than all your competitors.
- Negative Splits - Go out slower than the average pace and speed up at the end. Negative splits are used by competitors who like to finish strong and maintain they are motivated by passing people in the latter stages of the race.
- Even Splits - Run an even pace, (or effort) throughout the race. Even splits have been the source of most peak performances in running. Even pacing usually means even effort since on hilly courses the pace might vary a great deal.

Practice running your race pace so that you will be able to maintain it during your race. If you consistently have difficulty judging your pace, try using a pulse rate monitor.

Cutting Corners

This is not cheating. The only race courses which are "guaranteed" to be accurate are those which are "certified" by the USATF (USA Track & Field). The USATF requires that courses be measured over the shortest route open to the runners. This means that the course is measured on a route that cuts all corners as closely as possible to the inside apex, usually within 6 inches of the road edge. To run the shortest route, keep as close as possible to the inside edge of the road on all turns, and as you come out of the turn, assume a straight line route to the inside of the next turn. Practice doing this in your training on roads or trails that are traffic free.

Taking Aid

Research has shown that you can become dehydrated in as little as 45 minutes. Therefore, aid can benefit you even in shorter races. You should always hydrate yourself well before the start of any race. Consume about 16 ounces of fluid an hour before the start. Pick up a cup at each aid station; pouring any extra water over your head and shoulders if you need more cooling. You should drink at least 6 ounces of water for every 15 - 20 minutes of exercise. In hot conditions, you will need more fluids. In longer events, you will benefit from the ingestion of two cups of fluids containing carbohydrates per hour, allowing for better absorption of water and carbs. Races usually alternate water and replacement fluids at the aid stations if they are close together.

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RACE ETIQUETTE (from Running Planet, www.runningplanet.com)

To make your race a more enjoyable event; follow these informal and unofficial rules of racing:

Register early

You can register on race day at the registration table, at a number of pre-race registration locations, by mail, and sometimes over the internet. You should plan on registering early at a pre-race registration site, by mail or by internet. This will guarantee that you will get a T-shirt and a spot in the race. By registering early you won't have to worry about registering on race day.

Arrive early on race day

Plan to arrive at least 45 minutes to an hour early on race day. This will give you time to park, jog to the start and warm-up.

Line up in your proper starting position

The fastest runners should line up at the front of the pack. The slower runners should line up farther back. The walkers should line up at the back of the pack. This is to ensure a safe and efficient start.

Fluid & aid stations

Shorter races, usually 5 miles and shorter, will have one or two water stations. Medium distance races, like the 10K, will have three or four water stations. Longer races (Marathons, ultra marathons) will have fluid (water and fluid replacement) and aid stations at every other mile marker. Some races have them set up at every mile marker.

Finishing

As you approach the finish line, make sure your number is visible on the front of your shirt or shorts. If your number is not visible you may not be scored and timed properly at the finish. Pass through the finishing chute that you are directed to and keep moving. Do not stop in the chute. There may be a lot of runners finishing at the same time and if the chute becomes blocked a real log-jam can occur. Most races are timed by using a tab that is torn off at the finish. Start tearing your tag off as soon as you pass over the finish line and hand it to the volunteer at the end of the chute.

T-shirts

Even if you are new to racing, you don't want to look like it. One thing that makes a new racer stand out is by wearing the race T-shirt that you were given at registration. This is one of those unofficial "un-cool" things that only experienced runners know about. You never wear your race shirt in the race. Wear a shirt from a different race or from the same race at an earlier year. Do that and no one will know that you are a novice racer.