South Coast Challenge

Runners Training Guide

Your guide to getting fit & ready for your challenge!
Welcome to the South Coast running guide

Some of you will be seasoned Ultra-runners who are either using the challenge as an opportunity to train for a competitive race or to set a personal best; Whereas others will be using the event as an attempt to complete your first Ultra Marathon.

Whatever your motivation for signing up with Action Challenge and taking part in one of our ~25 km / ~50 km/ ~100 km Challenges, we would like to provide you with all the information and materials you will need to give you the best chance at achieving your own personal goals. Ultra Marathon is an extremely broad definition for any race or challenge that is longer than the standard 42.1 km or 26.2 Miles of a marathon. It is estimated that over 70,000 people take part in Ultra Marathon events world-wide, each year, which makes the Ultra-Marathon community extremely small and close knit.

The most common Ultra Marathon distances are 50km, 100 km, 100 miles. The official IAAF world record event takes place over a distance of 100 km and the world record for this distance currently rests at 6:13:33 mins set by Japanese athlete Sunada Takahiro on road. Other distances include double marathons, 24-hour races, and multiday races of 1000 miles or even longer.

The format of these courses can vary dramatically from single or multiple lap routes, to point-to-point, to road routes or trails. Many Ultra’s can also include additional challenges such as inclement weather, elevation change or rugged terrain.

At Action Challenge we have five separate events for long distance and Ultra Marathon Runners. These are The Isle of Wight Challenge, The London 2 Brighton Challenge, The Cotswolds Way, The South Coast Challenge and The Thames Path Challenge. All five events have 100 km options which take place predominantly on trails. All the routes are fully signed and supported so all you need to do on the day is turn up and run. We believe this style of challenge suits every type of runner as it gives you the freedom to take part in a challenge where the only thing you need to concentrate on, is your run - everything else is taken care of.

TAKING ON THE 54 KM ULTRA

Running your first ultra...

By signing up to one of our ultra challenges some of you will be embarking on your first Ultra Marathon event. We suggest that you should have run at least one marathon prior to embarking on the challenge. If this is the case, we strongly advise attempting the 54 km challenge first in order to give yourself the best chance of finishing the event without over training or injury. If the first race goes well, then there will always be the next 100 km round the corner!

There is no single guide to becoming an Ultra Marathon runner or standard way of training. When covering such vast distances, the differences between the way your body works to that of the person next to you become increasingly apparent. This guide is designed to give you the best advice those in the community have collated, but fundamentally everyone runs their own challenge their own way. So apply your own logic to your own training, listen to your body and experiment with as many different ways of training as possible, until you find what works best for you.

From marathon to ultra marathon...

For those of you who have taken on a Marathon or two already and done quite well, you may be tempted to think that taking on the 54 km challenge at only 5 miles more than the standard Marathon may not be a massive undertaking and for some of you it may not be.
100KM CHALLENGE
Taking on the longer distance..

Don’t over commit to training. Don’t overstretch yourself, you want to reach the event day in peak physical fitness but without being burnt out.

- Learn for to tackle the added trials that a longer distance will bring.
- Get used to having to digest food whilst running.
- Set realistic expectations, if this is your first Ultra just aim to finish.
- Except the fact you will not run the whole way!
- Start having a weekly long run and increasing it in distance by 10% each week.
- Learn to run in different conditions and at different times of day.

You may be a talented runner and have completed several marathon’s in the past, but 100 km Ultra Marathon running is a completely different challenge and must be prepared for in different ways. Not only do you have to train your body physically to run much longer distances, you also have to cope with added factors such as fatigue and pain management over a far greater period of time. Moreover, unlike marathons where you can complete the race with fluids alone, when entering Ultra’s eating and drinking suddenly become an integral part of your challenge and being able to adequately manage your diet and hydration throughout the event will become paramount to achieving success. More often than not, novice Ultra runners fail to complete their challenge due to making the wrong dietary choices, rather than through being overcome with fatigue.

However there are a few subtle differences between the challenge you are now embarking on and your standard city marathon. Firstly most Marathons take place on closed roads. The courses are usually on tarmac, predominantly flat and cornered off from the public to give you a clear, obvious path in front of you. For many these are the perfect marathon conditions as they take place on the same surface you are used to training on. Once you have done more than one of these you begin to get used to the ‘wall’ you can hit in the later teens / early 20’s and have learnt how to dig deep and push on. If this sounds like you then you are already in a fantastic position to take on our 54 km challenge. However this is no time to get over confident about the challenge at hand. Although the 54 km geographically is only five more miles, the terrain of the challenge will be entirely different and will affect your run in almost every way.

You will no longer be running solely on tarmac as the majority of our 50 km challenges take place on trails. If the weather in the lead up to the challenge has been warm and sunny (fingers crossed) this may not have an overwhelming impact, however if it has been raining and miserable as it often can be in the UK, you could be running on well trodden, muddy paths. This will have huge impact on your run. Trying to maintain your balance whilst moving through this type of terrain can be exhausting, you will have to be more vigilant about where you tread and will also use different muscle to maintain your balance whilst you run on uneven ground. By adding this additional obstacle to your challenge you will find that you tire quicker in the challenge, different muscles will ache and your joints will feel the impact of the difficult terrain. On the start line, five miles may not seem like a lot more when you have already run 26 miles, but by the 20th mile you will soon realize it makes a lot of difference.

To give yourself the best chance of completing your first Ultra, you should continue to train the way in which you prepare for a marathon, but where possible switch your training from tarmac to trails.

Get used to the impact the different surface will have on your run and build up the muscles more associated with balance. The more prepared you can be for the different terrain, the less a factor the increased mileage will be and therefore the more likely you will be to complete and enjoy your challenge.
Setting realistic expectations...

When embarking on your first Ultra Marathon the first thing you need to do is set realistic expectations. For your first challenge the aim should not be to come first, to finish in the top 20 or even to beat a specific time. For your first 100 km Ultra the goal should simply be to finish. Once you have finished your first few Ultras then you can start to set your-self timing goals and begin to push yourself, but until you have adequately established how it feels to take part in a 100 km Ultra and understand how your body copes with the increase in distance and dietary balance, there is no point pushing yourself to the point of injury or failure. Your first Ultra is an experiment. Use it to establish what works and what doesn’t for you, then take this knowledge and build upon it in the next challenge. In setting realistic expectations you should also appreciate that you are probably not going to run the entire distance, and there is no shame in this. Especially for the 100 km challenge showing up on the day and believing you are going to run all 62 miles is just not realistic. For your first Ultra you should set a plan to walk all the up-hill parts of the course, run all the down-hill slopes and do your best to run all the flats where you can. This does not mean you should be aiming to treat half the challenge as a gentle stroll in the countryside, but instead you should appreciate the benefits the power hiking and fast walking can bring to your challenge and training. Your first Ultra should set a platform for you to build upon and the further you go in the challenge the more experience you will have to put into practice on the next challenge. If you push yourself too hard and burn out too early there is very little you will be able to take away from the challenge.

The next best thing you can do to prepare for your first challenge is research. Find out the format of the day ahead, what food stations are there? How far apart are they? What do you need to take with you? Is there a bag drop? How is the route marked? What is the surface of the course like? Once you have all this information you will need to start applying it to your training. A general rule to keep in mind is ‘If you not going to do it on the day, don’t do it in practice.’ If the challenge is on trail tracks, you should be training on trail tracks. If there are food stops every 25 km you should only be eating every 25 km. By doing this your body will be prepared for the conditions on the day and you will have learnt what you works for you, before the challenge begins.

Growing your mileage - the weekly run

Unsurprisingly training for an Ultra Marathon is all about increasing your mileage. The easiest way to do this is to build up the time spent on your feet. Every training plan has different aspects and recommendations within it, but throughout the Ultra community the one thing that is a constant is the weekly long run. When training for your first Ultra you should be looking at completing three runs a week, the first two should cover relatively short distances 5 – 10 km, (this is where you should incorporate other aspects of training – see the training plan at the end of the guide) then once a week you should have your ‘long run.’

The weekly long run is the most important factor in your training plan. This is the time where you find out how all your other strength training affects your overall performance. Throughout the build-up to the event you should be constantly increasing the distance of the long run, so that you can increase your overall mileage. The vast proportion of the run, should be spent in an aerobic state, you should feel comfortable maintain your breathing rhythm and not feel that you are short of breath or over-heating. In order to help you judge the sort of pace you should be aiming for, you should only be getting into an anaerobic state a few times on the run, when faced with larger hills. If you find that you are hitting an anaerobic state more frequently than this you should cut back your pace and stop pushing as hard. The idea of the run is to increase your mileage and you will be unable to do this if you burn out too quickly. You can add intervals of faster running to help develop different muscles and break up the monotony of the run, but the aim is to run far, not fast.

The weekly long run is part of your training and should not be seen as a challenge in itself. You should be able to do a full day’s work, your weekly run and then still be able to go for a shorter training run the next day if you needed to. Training in this way will help build up your mileage in a constant and consistent manner, allowing your body to adapt to working while tired but still allowing recovery enough to prevent any damage or unnecessary strain. Your aim should be to increase your mileage to the point where a few weeks before the challenge you are able to run between 54 km – 60 km (100 km challenge) 25 km/30 km (50 km challenge) and although tired, after a short break you could easily continue running.
**NIGHT RUNNING**

For those of you attempting the 100 km challenge, you should be aiming to complete the course within 15 hrs. However if this is your first Ultra it would be naive to believe that this is guaranteed. Therefore it is advisable to do some of your training later on in the day, to get some experience of running at sunset and how the changing light conditions may affect your run.

Hopefully if the challenge goes well for you, this particular experience may not be crucial to your overall performance, however if the run does not go according to plan, it may save the last few hours of your challenge. It is also advisable to carry a head torch with you during the run, they are extremely light and don't take up a lot of space, but will be invaluable to you if you still find yourself out on the course as the sun starts to set. You are far more likely to twist an ankle when running on a trail in fading light, which could potentially ruin your challenge as well as the rest of your season.

**WHAT TO EXPECT ON THE DAY**

- Prepare yourself for the day ahead.
- Learn as much as you can about the event in advance so there will be no last minute surprises.
- Learn what type of food you will be served during the challenge so you can practice eating similar foods in training.

**Timings**

Across our 100 km series we divide our challenge into two separate events, one for walkers and one for runners. As you may have noticed when you sign up to the event you are given the option to select your start time to the nearest hour. We have different time brackets for the runners who are set off before the walkers to ensure you have any uncongested path a head of you so that you can concentrate fully on your run rather than battling you way through thousands of walkers.

Runners will be set of in 15 mins slots to prevent overcrowding on the path. You will be given your particular start time approximately one month before you challenge. For many this will mean an early start on the morning of the challenge it should help to ensure that most of you will finish your challenge comfortably within daylight hours.

We specify that in order to be classified as a runner you should aim to complete the 100 km challenge within 15 hours, 54 km challenge within 7hrs and the 25 km challenge within 3 hrs. This is to give you an idea of what we would call an Ultra Marathon pace, and separate those who are serious runners from those who would like to approach the challenge with a more jog/walk approach. However, don’t panic, if you fail to complete the challenge within the recommended time, you will still be able to continue and you will still receive a time at the end of the challenge. It is very difficult to predict what time you will get over a distance of this magnitude so we appreciate that some will take longer than they initially hoped, but if you feel that you are a long way off this pace as your training isn’t going as well as you thought or you picked up an injury en route, it may be better to change your registration to that of a walker so that we can provide you with the appropriate support during the event.

**Food, rest stops, support**

During the challenge you will find there is a rest-stop of some kind roughly every 12.5 km. All rest stops will have medical support, access to water, toilets, members of AC staff, energy solutions and an area for you to sit down if needed. The larger rest-stops at 25 km, 50 km and 75 km are designed for longer periods of rest, somewhere between 10 mins – 20 mins, whereas the midpoint stops are designed more for stops of 2 – 10 mins. You do not have to stop for this long at each stop and equally there is no upper limit as to how long you rest for, but it is mandatory for you to check in at each stop so that we can check where you are on the course for your own safety. At the 54 km and 80 km rest stops you will receive hot meals, again it is not mandatory that you eat at these stops but you will still need to check in, there will also be masseuses at some stops and at the 50 km stop you will also have access to your bag, if you have chosen to check one in.
HEALTH & WELL BEING

● Make sure you learn what food will and won’t work for you during the event.
● Learn how to adequately fuel yourself for the task at hand
● Understand what calories intake you will need to perform at your best.

Start experimenting with different types of food to find out what works for you...

The long run must also incorporate eating and drinking training and experimentation. Again, more runners are lost to lack of energy from not eating properly than for muscle fatigue. On any run over 10 miles in length, you should integrate eating and drinking training. You need to train your body to process food and liquid while on the run.

You will also need to figure out which foods you can digest whilst exercising, without feeling too lethargic or bloated afterwards or which foods may not agree with you at all. During the challenge you will be supplied with carbohydrate rich food to supply you with the fuel you will need to complete the challenge. At Action Challenge we will aim to make different types of food available to cover most dietary requirements, however if you have an especially limited diet you may want to ensure you bring supplementary food with you to ensure that you have enough food to finish your challenge comfortably, should there not be anything you like at a rest stop. Below are some rough guidelines of what sort of fluid and calorie intake you will need to adequately fuel your body throughout the challenge.

FOOD & NUTRITION

The basic science behind adequately fuelling yourself through an Ultra Marathon is recognizing that your useable energy is stored in glycogen, a form of carbohydrate, which is stored around the muscles and the liver; if you deplete your stores of glycogen too much then you will eventually hit ‘the wall.’ Therefore the secret to being successful in an Ultra is to train your body to access multiple glycogen stores effectively, whilst learning how to replace them during the challenge.

An athlete with only 5% body fat has enough energy stored in the fat to walk 100 miles, so accessing and converting fat is the key to a successful challenge. Although you do have enough glycogen stored to cover the distance as a walk, the conversion of glycogen takes time, which as a runner you don’t have time, you will therefore need to supplement the glycogen stores with an intake of more immediate energy in the form of carbohydrate during your challenge. The best type of carbohydrate intake during your challenge is easily digestible complex carbohydrates such as cake, sandwiches, malt loaf, rice pudding and mashed potato. These work better than simple sugars as they provide a steady stream of useable energy, rather than swamping the system with immediate energy that will stop the body from converting carbohydrate to useable glycogen.

As well as carbohydrates you will also need to consume protein during your challenge. This is because there is a massive degradation of the muscles during an Ultra event, which can be minimized through the intake of protein whilst exercising. Performance has been proved to improve during a regular protein intake, however during an event you will want the protein to be easily digestible so it is advisable to get it from sources such as cheese, yoghurt or soya protein drinks, rather than heavy meat. It is also important to take in a proportion of fat during the challenge. This is because the body uses fat to convert protein and carbohydrates and is used to getting a portion of fat in most meals, therefore it is advisable to not distort the bodies usual pattern as under extreme stress this may be enough to upset your system.

Prior to event day you should focus on building up your glycogen store a couple of days before the event through eating more protein and carbohydrates. It takes a while for the food to reach the muscles as glycogen, so it is best to avoid binging on carbohydrates the day before the challenge as this will just leave you bloated and in need of the toilet.

A litre of isotonic solution (no more than 8% solution is recommended) should be consumed in the hour before the start of the event. Please remember that it is important not to overload on just water as taking in too much without an isotonic solution will just lead to you washing away your natural minerals and eventually cause cramp.
Managing your fluid intake during the challenge is extremely important, too little fluid before the event and during the first couple of hours will result in the body over-heating, dehydrating and eventually running out of energy; it is no good waiting till you feel thirsty as by then it is already too late, your objective should be to drink at least a litre of water every hour you are on the course. Too much liquid or liquid of an excessive concentration will result in overfilling, heaviness, stomach cramps and eventual vomiting.

Useful tips

- Everyone reacts differently and you need to figure out what works for you through practice, rather than finding out on the day of the event.
- Make sure you are adequately hydrated before you start the event, you should drink at least a litre of no more than an 8% carbohydrate solution.
- During the challenge you should be aiming to drink at least a litre of water every hour, you may want to double that in especially warm conditions.
- You will need to balance a diet of both protein and carbohydrate intake during the challenge along with a degree of fat intake.
- If you start to experience problems during the challenge, keep going, but reduce your speed and drink some simple sugar solution until you start to feel better.
- Avoid fizzy drinks, as they make you feel full as well as caffeinated drinks as they are dehydrating.
- After the event continue to hydrate, and eat a balanced meal.

REMAINING INJURY FREE
Injury is an inevitable part of any athlete’s journey and is unfortunately not something that can ever be 100% avoided. However there are things that you can do to minimize the likelihood of injuries occurring.

The main advise to follow is not to over-train. Too many contenders start to panic in the final weeks leading up to the event and feel as though there is more they need to be doing to be adequately prepared for the event. However constantly hitting the road or the gym will only cause constant muscular niggles which threaten to hinder your training and lead to constant tiredness as you push your body beyond the sensible limits. This will in turn damage your immune system and lead to an endless stream of colds and lethargy.

If you want to build up your training volume, increase your mileage in small amounts, not more than 10% per week and remember the value of non impact supports in looking after your joints. Also make sure you work out routine is varied to avoid overloading specific muscle groups. Balancing heavy training with sufficient rest to promote healing and recovery.

YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM
As mentioned above the key to successful training is to find over the course of weeks and months a workload you feel is challenging and progressive but is not so punishing that you spend all your spare time at the physio or are prone to constant colds as a result of over-training that has weakened your immune system, leading to missed days and weeks of training. However you also need to protect your immune system once you have finished your challenge as well. During the event your body will take a battering so you need to leave plenty of time to recover once you have completed the challenge.

Your immune system will be at an all-time low, so take vitamin and mineral supplements to prevent against infection. Eat and drink well in the days immediately preceding the event to make sure your body has enough nutrients and proteins to repair the damage and tears inflicted on your muscles. Many runners aren’t very good at sitting still so if you do need to keep moving, try a period of “active rest” and indulge in light, low-impact exercise such as swimming, walking or cross training, but don’t overdo it or you will soon find you have a cold coming on.
The Training Guide

- Understand the advantages of different types of training.
- Strength building is equally as important as aerobic conditioning.
- Hill training is vital to getting the best out of your performance.

The aim of your training is to increase your distance whilst maintaining a reasonable pace. However, there are many ways of achieving this goal, rather than just constantly running. Although that is not a bad place to start, you will soon get bored of your training routine.

Running is a useful element of cross training, but gym work is another. Runners still need power and strength in the upper body, so making sure you work out the chest, shoulders, back, abs and arms is crucial to help your style and your speed. Make sure you build up your muscle groups evenly so that your body is in balance, otherwise you will soon find aches and pains emerging.

Some runners find it helpful to use lighter smaller weights in rapid repetition rather than heavy weights, as the runners aim is to build up strength and tone with speed, rather than bulk. In conjunction with strength training it is also important to add an element of Long Slow Distance (LSD) Training to your workouts, this will most likely be incorporated through your weekly long run. The advantage of LSD training is that not only does it help you progressively build up your mileage, it also helps improve your cardiovascular function therefore increasing your maximum oxygen uptake levels; trains your body to improve and increase your thermo regulatory function so you don’t over heat or burn out too early; and also trains your body to learn how to effectively convert glycogen levels whilst exercising.

Through your LSD training you are also more likely to learn about what does and doesn’t work effectively for you during training and will give you a chance to establish what is likely to cause problems in the later stages of your race.

Hill training is also an important part of your plan. Depending on the challenge, you are likely to encounter different gradients along your route. Incorporating hill training into your workouts is essential, as hill running tweaks your rhythm, requires a far greater level of exertion and puts an immense strain on your body. Through training you can improve your leg muscle strength as well as your cardiovascular system, which should make the challenge of climbing hills that little bit less challenging. It will also provide a platform for you to test out the strength training you have already been doing in the gym. When running up hills you should try and put in the same amount of effort you have been, when running on flats – not the same pace. If you try to keep up the same pace on the hills you will just exhaust yourself later on in the challenge. Your breathing rhythm should remain the same, if it starts to quicken cut back a little. There is no substitute for the experience you gain every time you go for a long run, however remember running is not the only form of exercise, that can help improve your performance. Especially when running on roads the impact on your joint can start to take its toll after a while, so it is advisable to give them a break by incorporating non-impact forms of exercise such as swimming on cycling. Both will still allow you to improve your aerobic condition as well as building muscle strength, as well as providing variation within your training. Swimming is especially good if you are recovering from an injury or have begun to notice minor problems you may have picked up through over training.

Finally don’t forget to taper your training. During the challenge your body is going to go through a massive trial and you will need to be well rested before you take on the course. Cut back on your training almost completely the week before the challenge. You can remain active and it is advisable to do so, but you should not feel tired after your activities, as you need to build up your stores of glycogen as you will need them during the challenge. Although it seems counterintuitive you will not lose any aerobic fitness in a week or two of tapering, if anything your body will become stronger through the periods of rest, rather than through a hard work out. Your body will need time to repair the muscle damage that has occurred through the long period of training and it will also give your immune system a chance to recover prior to challenge day. You should begin to taper after you have completed your last long run, which should be around 60 – 75% of the overall distance you are planning on completing in your challenge.