

Long-Distance Event Recovery

By Dave McGovern

If you've ever trained for a walking race you probably did a lot of digging for information on how to train for the event. And no doubt you were successful. There's plenty of information in books and online (some good information, some less so...) on how to train for 5Ks or 10Ks, half marathons or marathons. But what about after the event? It's just as important to know what to do to recover from and begin training again after the event, but that information is less readily available.



At this point you're no-doubt saying to yourself, "Self, I sure wish Dave would write a few words on how to recover from a walking race or long-distance walking event." Well, you're in luck! Without further ado, a few words on how to recover from a walking race or long-distance walking event:

Before the Event

Yes, recovering from a race actually starts before the race even begins. Being physically prepared for the event—um, training?—and being well hydrated and carbo-loaded will help to prevent an ugly "crash" in the race that will delay recovery.

The surest way to avoid the post-marathon blues is to train adequately for the distance you'll be covering. That means building up to at least a few 18- to 20-mile walks for a marathon, 10- to 12-mile walks for a half marathon; the last of these no closer than two, but preferably three weeks before your big event.

If you only get up to 15 miles or so in marathon training, chances are you'll finish the race, but you can probably expect to be sore or even injured afterward. You really do need to get those long walks in to strengthen your joints and to teach your body to burn fat instead of carbohydrates during the marathon.

Having said that, it's not necessary—or advisable—to walk too far in training. Some walkers figure that doing 23 or 24 miles in training will help them to build confidence. Maybe so, but every mile you walk over 20 in training increases your likelihood of injury and adds to your recovery time.

Ultra-long training walks also are more likely to slow down your race pace than they are to improve it. Rest assured, if you can make it through 20 in training (12 for a half) you'll make it through 26.2 just as easily in the race.

In addition to building endurance and helping you to learn your marathon pace, long-distance walks are where you'll teach yourself to eat and drink on the go. Much of the soreness you feel after a long event is due to dehydration and carbohydrate depletion. So you'll have to get your stomach used to taking in about 8 oz. of fluid every 15 min. (on average), as well as getting your gut used to tolerating sports drinks or gels to avoid carbohydrate depletion.

During the Race

What you do during the race has a great deal to do with how you'll feel afterward. Smart pacing is not just a way to ensure a fast marathon time, it's also one of the keys to quick post-marathon recovery.

Starting out too fast prompts your body to burn a high percentage of carbohydrates during the race. If that happens you'll become carbohydrate-depleted toward the end and you'll "hit the wall." Your muscles will become very inefficient at burning fat as a fuel.

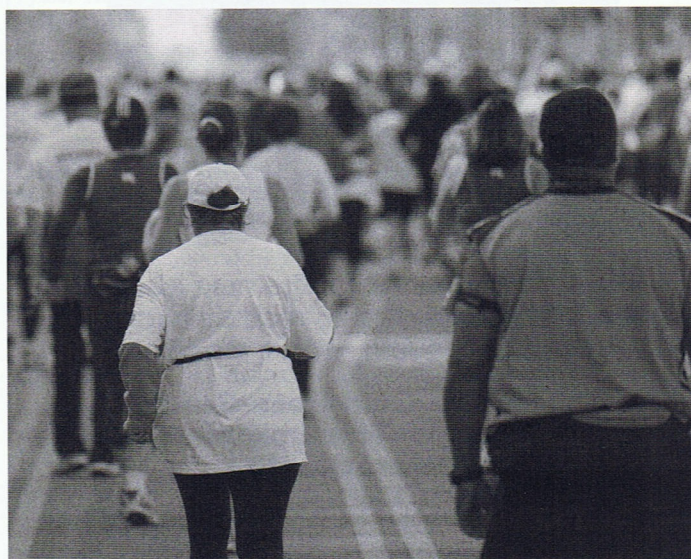
No carbohydrates and no fats leaves only one fuel source: protein. If you hit the wall and keep walking you'll actually start breaking down muscle tissue to use as a fuel source. It's certainly not fatal, and you'll eventually recover, but you'll feel beat up for **weeks** after the marathon rather than **days**.

Luckily, the wall is easily avoidable for long-distance walkers. All you need to do is start out at a reasonable pace and you'll set your muscles up to burn fat rather than carbohydrates. After 10 or 12 miles for a marathon, if you're feeling really good, you can pick up the pace a bit.

If you've started at the right pace you should be able to pick it up even more over the final 5 or 10 kilometers. Your overall time will be much faster than it would be had you started out fast and "crashed," and your recovery after the race will be much faster.

Taking in those 8 oz. of fluid every 15 min. and drinking or eating carbohydrates after the first 90 min. or so into the race are also good ways to ensure a fast event recovery. Staving off dehydration, and supplementing your carbohydrate stores will keep your muscles working efficiently, ensuring that you'll be burning fats and carbohydrates instead of muscle protein in the late stages of the race.

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What you do during a long-distance race, such as a marathon, has a great deal to do with how you'll feel afterward.

50 Walks States Weeks

Walking in 50 states in 50 weeks to promote community wellness was the idea. To invite community leaders to participate in a 5-mile walk in every state capital across the United States was the implementation. The result was the WeWhoWalk national tour.

“This is my passion,” says Sue Parks about walking. In fact, it has become such a major part of her life, she quit a high-level corporate job to devote her life to promoting walking and fitness. With that passion, she started WalkStyles, a company that offers walking products and services that improve lives through walking.

She attributes the idea for walking in 50 states to her facing her own 50th birthday. “I was probably just thinking about the number 50 when the idea occurred to me,” she says. The program was announced on March 10, 2007 and the first official walk was held in Boise, Idaho on May 1.

The format of the walks is pretty simple. At

7:30 a.m. the participants meet at a local hotel or meeting room. Participants can mingle and enjoy a healthy continental breakfast until 8. From 8 to 8:30 is a presentation about the national walking tour and the pre-determined course in that particular city. Participants each receive a T-shirt, a group photo is taken, and the walk starts promptly at 8:30. “If you can’t do 5 miles, then there are designated turn around points,” says Sue. The walk finishes by 10:30 and the entire event is over by 11 a.m.

So far each event has attracted around 50 people. “It’s energizing meeting phenomenal people. It’s great,” says Sue. “We have had positive feedback. Many people have lived in the city for years but have never walked those particular parts.”

She also discovered that each city has its own nuance. “We have had business leaders, non-profit leaders, retired people, and in the summer teachers—people who believe in wellness and have seen the importance of activity.

These are people who are engaged in the community.”

How it Started

Because she is an avid walker, Parks understands that for many people it is easier to maintain a walking program if they have someone to walk with. “I challenged my team to create a community site to help people find others to walk with,” says Parks. Under the WalkStyles umbrella, WeWhoWalk started as an innovative program that created online walking communities. Registered members can search for others in their



The DashTrak system is a pedometer that allows users to track their steps online.

area, locate walking clubs, or just chat in the discussion forums. Participants can even create their own walking clubs. There is no charge for basic membership. Platinum membership offers some additional perks such as an online walking journal and online step tracking with the WalkStyles pedometer, the DashTrak system.

The success of the online communities caused Sue to look for other ways to reach out to people and encourage them to walk.

And Sue gets the benefit of hearing about the positive impact walking has had on the lives of those she has touched. She hears from women with various health ailments, such as high blood pressure, who have had symptoms disappear because of walking and their participation in the online discussion groups. Many have lost weight and are living healthier lives as a direct result of the online community. ♦

