



Heat seekers

A few cursory touches of the toes and a little sprint here and there and you're away, aren't you? Pay a bit more attention to the right warm up for your distance and reap the benefits

Have you ever stood on the start line for a race wondering if you have warmed up enough or too much? Perhaps you have watched the elite runners and considered if you should try the same warm up but then realised your legs and arms just can't get into those peculiar positions.

It's a complicated business this warming up and runners often arrive at races not sure of what type of warm up they should do for how long or when.

The key is to know what you should be doing to best prepare for the distance you're racing.

It would be a mistake to try something at a race that you have not already attempted and found useful in training. Arriving at a race is all about being organised and having a fail-safe routine that works for you. It will have been practised, shaped and completed many times before in training and prior to key sessions. Maybe you always warm up for 10 to 15 minutes with easy running before a 5k or 10k, then complete some light drills and a few strides. If this works then stick to it.

However, many of you will arrive hopefully an hour or so before a big race starts and then wonder what to do next. Nerves can take over and you could find yourself

anxiously copying the guy next to you who is skipping with high legs, like a guard outside the Kremlin, or sipping excess water and eating snacks, all because the voices in your head are on overtime.

Follow this plan to help you build a fail-safe routine and dispel those pre-race doubts.

The 5k and 10k

These races can be pretty quick and the intensity you race at is tough if you want that PB. You will certainly be in pain at some point in either race. Your warm up needs to be progressive.

- Start with a 10 to 20-minute warm-up jog that gradually builds pace and intensity. Start slowly and maybe run five minutes very easy, five minutes steady and then a few minutes close to or at race pace.

- Many of you will leave the front door for a run and only start to feel good five to 10 minutes down the road. You can't afford for this to happen on race day over the 5 or 10k - you need to be ready to roll from the 'B' of the 'Bang'. So wind the pace up in that warm-up and open up the body, making sure the core is warm and heart rate strong at the end. Crucially the pace and potential lactate levels produced in the first few miles of the race won't be damaging now.

- You are now ready to complete two to three sets of the five drills on p32. Aim to complete these over a 10-metre, safe bit of road, track or grass and walk/jog lightly back after each effort. Continue sipping water or sports drink occasionally throughout.



■ You are now loose and ready to run some strides. These are the final steps and really help with the first mile as you ease into your race pace. Find a 60-70m flat and straight area where you run out focusing on good technique three to four times. Each effort could see you jog easily back and intensity is gradually increased. No.1 might be at 60 per cent max speed, No.2 could be 70 per cent, No 3 at 80 per cent and No 4 might be quicker than race pace and 90 per cent.

■ You are now ready, just stay warm. Start positively but sensibly, aiming to gradually reach your race pace in the first few hundred metres.

The half-marathon

Those familiar to this distance will know that it can feel like the perfect threshold run or be completed at an intensity faster than your steady runs but never as hard from the offset as a 5 or 10k. Your warm up doesn't need to be as long but a jog that builds to half-marathon planned intensity is ideal.

■ Five to 10 minutes of running is enough, as you must also preserve energy and fuel for the race ahead.

You should also complete just one set of each of the drills on p32 and a few stride outs if you're looking for a PB or a fast time.

For those maybe new to the distance and aiming to get safely round outside two hours then the short five to 10-minute jog might even be enough. You will want to preserve our much valued carbohydrate stores for the race itself.

■ Have a plan and make sure you are in your race pen feeling loose and warm. Consider putting on an old tracksuit or race liner (a bin bag will do) while you wait in the pen for the race to start.

You may also want to take a gel 15-20 mins before the start and sip a few final mouthfuls of water to fully top up energy stores and hydration levels while waiting for the gun to sound.

Once you're under way, use the first mile or so to build into your planned race pace. You have 12 to 13 miles of running ahead of you and there is no rush.

The marathon

This is where the debate starts. It is wise to be careful. Some elite runners looking to run quick times might include a light jog for five to 10 minutes as they will need to run close to five-minute miles right from the start.

But for the real world runner this is dangerous as the marathon is all about you against the distance and you need to protect your carbohydrate stores.

■ I definitely recommend no warm up at all as you should use the first two to three miles to find your race pace and negotiate the early traffic and bottle necks if there are large numbers of runners. Don't panic if you are behind time by the 5km point as you still have 22-23 miles to go! You have bags of time to gradually build to your race pace and then maintain it.

■ Remember, the marathon starts at 20 miles and everything else is just to transport you to the start. Your job is to run at your planned pace, taking gels and drinks as practised in training. Any warm up will dent these stores and reduce your energy levels - and you will certainly need these in the last six miles.

■ At 20 miles you want all the months of hard training and clever long runs along with race day gel and drink strategies to kick into action for you...it's now time to race.

A few top tips

1 Warm up less on any warm or hot day. The secret here is loosening up without overheating. You will perform better if the body is cooled before starting. Maybe a short and very light jog before a few drills in the shade and then a few strides is enough.

2 Arrive early but if you're short on time at least try to jog for a few minutes. Then also use the first mile to ease into your race pace. Sprinting off in a panic will definitely see you tire quickly as the body is not ready.

3 Don't warm up and then stand around in your vest and shorts getting cold for ages. Idiot.

4 Time the warm up to finish just before the start or keep warm clothing on to preserve your core temperature. An old bin liner or old sweatshirt will do and you can throw these to the side on a cold day.

5 Consider taking a gel 10 to 20 mins before the start of the race just to boost blood sugars and sip a little liquid. There is research to suggest this boosts performance and tops up energy and blood sugars just before the race start.