

“How To” Course Description And Tutorial

How to Run a Great Twin Cities Marathon

A mile-by-mile guide by experienced Medtronic Twin Cities Marathon runner, Kirk Walztoni

Miles 0 to 1

Take it easy. Take it too easy. You will run faster than you think you are running, because of the adrenaline coursing through your veins and the veins of those around you. If you find yourself trapped amongst a bunch of people running too slowly for you, do not weave in and out of them. Save your energy. If mile one took longer to cover than you thought it would, do not panic. You have 25.2 miles left to go.

Miles 1 to 2

There is a nice downhill on mile two taking you down to the Walker Art Center’s Sculpture Garden. Then, you will take a left and head up a long hill. Take it easy up the hill. Do not judge yourself on how others around you are running. Many people charge up this hill, because they are feeling good. Do not let your breathing rate increase up the hill, and hold your perceived effort, because of the next mile.

Miles 2 to 3

Just after you hit mile two, you take a hard right and continue to climb. Maintain an even level of effort here, letting people pass you. You still have 24 miles to pass them back. Conserve your energy. There is always a great crowd here, which usually includes Alan Page, the former Purple People Eater, playing his tuba. The first water stop on the race is at mile 2.5. And this is a long water stop, so do not go to the first table. More importantly, do not skip the Gatorade* here. It is important to hydrate often, hydrate early and hydrate with electrolytes in addition to water.

I like to take one Gatorade* and one water per water stop, especially if the Gatorade* is over-mixed and sticky sweet. Gatorade* is roughly six percent carbohydrate by volume. But, if it has more sugar, it impedes absorption into your blood stream.

Now that you have hydrated, enjoy the nice downhill, which takes to towards Lake of the Isles.



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Miles 3 to 6

Cruise control time. You should be finding your pace here. If you ran too fast the first few miles, slow down, and get yourself back on schedule. If you ran too slowly, don't worry here, and do not try to make up for time lost. There will be plenty of time later to try to get back the little time you lost in the first few miles.

Be sure to remember to run the tangents, as this is a curvy section of the course. Do not be the person who runs 26.5 miles, because you stick to one side of the road; 26.2 miles if far enough.

There is a water stop at mile five. If you've been running for more than 40 minutes at this point, consider taking your first gel here. Take a gel with two cups of water to get close to the six percent carbohydrate level mentioned earlier. Do not take a gel with Gatorade*, as this could give you a stomach ache.

Miles 6 to 7

Lake Bde Maka Ska* to Lake Harriet. You know the hill. You've run it a hundred times during training. However, this time it will feel longer and steeper. Let the people around you pass you. Once you reach the top of the hill, relax and regain any breath you might have lost. Let the view of the Bandshell pull you down the hill and around the left hand turn down to Lake Harriet. There is another water stop at mile seven, so if you haven't done so already, down the gel now.

Miles 7 to 8

Enjoy the crowds here at miles seven to eight as these are the thickest crowds you'll see until Summit Avenue in St. Paul. After mile eight, take note as to how you feel. You should feel fresh at this point. If you do not feel fresh, take a mile off by slowing down by about 15 to 30 seconds off your mile pace and reassess.



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Miles 8 to 11

This is the trickiest part of the course. It is also where most people wreck their Twin Cities Marathon. Why? You've run the path countless times, but how many times have you run the road? The road is much hillier than the path. I've seen many people blow themselves up here by running these hills too hard. You may be tired of hearing this, but take it easy here. Let other people pass you on the uphill. If you are not getting passed, you are running too fast.

Once it flattens out, which is shortly after Portland Avenue, relax and find your goal marathon pace again

Miles 11 to 13

You take the right hand turn on to Cedar Avenue. There is another water stop here and another hill. This might be another great spot for a gel, depending on how long you've been out and your personal fueling strategy. There is also another long hill here. Be careful, and let people pass you. Once you've reached the top, relax, and find your marathon pace. Head over the bridge, take a sharp left hand turn on to Nokomis Parkway and head towards the half marathon mark. If you've followed the instructions so far, you should hit the half marathon mark feeling good. Mug for the cameras, as this is your chance to look good for a picture. These pictures are always better than the finish line photos. Assess your situation. How do you feel? Does running another 13 miles sound easy? Does it sound impossible? Adjust your goals as necessary. There is no doubt about it. The second half of the race is tougher than the first half, so be honest with yourself.

Miles 13 to 14

After you zip around Lake Nokomis, you take a hairpin curve back onto Minnehaha Parkway and, lo and behold, there is another hill. Hold your effort even up this hill. If you do, and you've taken it easy on the hills prior to this one, you will notice something new: people falling back compared to you. All of these people ran too hard, too early.

Do not be tempted by the Mel-o-Glaze donut shop, and keep on trucking down Minnehaha Parkway. I always take my second gel at the water stop at mile 13.5, leaving me with one gel left.



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Miles 14 to 19

If you’ve run a conservative race up to this point, now is the time to really start running your race. The course is flat to downhill through this section, and you’ve run these miles so many times that there should be no distractions. You’ll fly by Minnehaha Falls and then take a left onto West River Road into the area I call, “The Vacuum”, due to the lack of cheering fans and the isolation that it entails.

Motivation and cheers are at a premium here, so soak in the energy when you can. Keep up your water intake, and make sure to find the shade here, wherever possible. Also, remember to continue to run the tangents. However, if it is sunny, find the shade, and don’t worry about tangents. The sun is moving up in the sky by this time, and you want to keep as cool as you possibly can.

If you don’t feel great, take it easy through here, and conserve your energy. Don’t be afraid to slow down. You’ll want as much of it as possible come miles 20 to 23.

Lastly, there is a Clif Energy* Zone here at mile 17. Take one only if you know for a fact that you can stomach Clif Energy Gel*, and they have a flavor you know you can stomach.

Miles 19 to 21

There is another short, but very tough, climb up to the Franklin Bridge. Again, take it easy here, and conserve energy. Once on the bridge, take a look to your right and enjoy the fall colors on the river bluffs. It is simply beautiful.

The Medtronic Passage* is located just after the bridge and so is the ALARC “Wall” once you’ve turned onto East River Road. Again, find the shade through this section of the course, if it is a sunny day. I always take my last gel early in this section of the race.

There are a few more hills for you to conquer through this section. The first one comes immediately after the Lake Street Bridge* and is a surprise every time I run this race. People should look like they are moving backwards relative to you on this one, if you’ve run a smart race.

There is a nice downhill to the base of Lake Street, and then the second half of the marathon begins.

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Miles 21 to 23

The best thing that can be said about this section of the course is that it is only two miles long. Remember this: only two miles long. First, there is a climb from the base of the Lake Street Bridge. Then, you will turn left and face the hill to the University of St. Thomas. Keep moving through here, and attempt to keep your heart rate as low as possible. Once you reach the base of the steep hill, stare at the top of the hill, and keep trucking until you reach the top. Don't worry about the people around. Just keep moving, and just keep your effort even. Do not run so hard that you find yourself out of breath at the top of this hill. Once you've reached the top, the course turns right and then quickly left onto Summit Avenue. Here, there will be crowds, sun and more uphill running. Find the shade wherever possible, and keep drinking water. Maintain your pace through here. If you do, you will be moving past people around you. Break this portion of the course into small chunks: Cretin to Prior, Prior to Snelling. Once you've hit Snelling Avenue, you can smell the end of the climb and the end of the marathon.

Miles 23 to 25

You are done with the hills. Are you passing people through this section? If so, keep it up. Find someone to “lasso”, and pull them in. Take a little break, and do it again. Note how strong the sun is. Aren't you glad you avoided it the last 10 miles? There is no hiding from it in this section of the course. If there is a headwind here, work with other people going your speed, if there are any. Be greedy, and don't be a hero by being in the front of this group.

Once you are inside of 20 minutes to the finish, do not stop for water. In fact, do not stop for anything, because it can be tough to get moving again.

Miles 25 to 26

Did I say you were done with the hills? I lied. There is one more small hill right at mile 25. You can attack this one if you like. Once you take a left, remaining on Summit Avenue, there is one more mile left. Enjoy the scenery around you, and pull in that guy or gal in front of you. You either trained harder than they did or ran a smarter race than they did, right?

Miles 26 to 26.2

Once the Cathedral of Saint Paul appears out of nowhere on your left, find the last drop of energy you have. It is a downhill sprint to the finish. Do not ease up, and keep moving. Pass as many people as you can in the last quarter mile. You'll be surprised at how much strength you have left in those legs. Count how many people you pass and cruise to the finish. Congratulations on running a great Twin Cities Marathon.

*updated for course accuracy

