

Stafford Half Marathon Training Tips for During the Race

The information below has been provided by Clare Skelton, Stafford Half Marathon 2003 Ladies Race Winner who currently still holds the course record of 1hr 21mins 19secs.

Having been a runner for much of her life, Clare really knows her way around this Half Marathon course, and has covered many similar circuits in her time.

So, if you're a first time runner, or even if you're a more advanced runner looking for a few handy hints, then read on ... and good luck with this year's Half Marathon!

1. Set your WATCH at the start of the race, keeping track of time while you are running can be very useful.
2. Be careful not to start too fast. It is much easier to start off slowly and to increase your pace throughout the race, than to be struggling after the first mile. Standing on the start line in a position that reflects your ability will help ensure you set off at a realistic PACE.
3. Throughout the race take notice of the MILE MARKERS and try to work out your pace for each mile, this will give you an indication of how far you have to go in terms of both time and distance. If you have a personal time target, please take into consideration that it is an undulating course. Hence, varying mile times will be unavoidable.
4. Consider how you feel and whether you can keep on going at that pace, if not adjust your running speed before it is too late. However, if you do experience problems while running such as muscle cramp or breathing difficulties, St John's Ambulance and a team of paramedics will be on the route along with marshals who will ensure you receive assistance. Remember not to panic, stay relaxed and keep your BREATHING controlled, long deep breaths will increase oxygen uptake.
5. Make use of the WATER bottles provided at every water station. Even if you feel fine, dehydration will severely hinder your performance and can lead to muscle cramp and fatigue. Take small, slow sips of water, this may require carrying a water bottle for a short way while you are running. The design of the water bottles will ensure that this is possible. Gulping the water often results in coughing, fighting for breath and indigestion. There will be four water stations along the course, situated at 5 miles, 8 miles, 11 miles and at the start and finish.
6. Set yourself small realistic CHALLENGES throughout the race. You can use markers in the distance. For example, to keep your pace going to the next lamppost, to overtake the runner in front before the next mile marker, not to allow any other runner to come past before the next corner or to keep the runner ahead in sight. Such challenges help maintain concentration throughout the race and will increase your motivation levels.
7. Hills are challenging and there are plenty in the Stafford Half Marathon. Radford Bank and Tixall bank are long steep gradients that must be treated with respect. When running UPHILL fix your eyes on the ground at a point 5 meters ahead. Often looking at the top of the hill can be demoralising when you are near the bottom. Remember to pace yourself, use your arms and keep your stride length. Running to a RHYTHM is important, one way to do this is to count, this technique works for Paula Radcliffe (counting to 100 is 1 mile for Paula) so I'm sure it will work for you.
8. DOWNHILL sections can be used to RELAX, drop your arms, take some deep breaths and enjoy the scenery while you have the chance! However keep concentrating and try not to lose your running rhythm.

9. The majority of participants will really struggle at the 9 MILE MARK onwards; this is three quarters of the way through the race, mentally the most challenging. It does not help that both the Beaconside Road and the Railway Cutting are long straight sections of the course. At this stage your legs will be feeling heavy and tired. Stay positive at this point, the worst is over and there are no more hills on the course! It is important to keep relaxed, dropping your arms down and taking some deep breaths often helps. Remember to stay focused and keep your running rhythm going, 'if you're hurting so is everyone else!'

10. ENJOY the experience, it doesn't really matter how long it takes you, it's the taking part that counts and completing the 13.1mile challenge.

Good luck and keep smiling!