

Preparing for the 2015 Sanlam Cape Town Marathon

Few people in South Africa are better equipped to offer advice on road running than Elana Meyer, a former Olympic 10,000m silver medallist, world half-marathon champion and world record holder over 5km, 15km and 21.1km.



Having set six of the eight fastest times in the SA women's all-time list over the classic 42.2km standard marathon distance, the retired athlete and Stellenbosch resident took time out to share some wisdom with those who will tackle the second Sanlam Cape Town Marathon, to be held on 20 September 2015.

"Preparing for a marathon, the focus should be on strength, endurance and pace runs," Meyer says. "You need to be strong if you want to run a good marathon. By incorporating strength conditioning it will help you stay injury free and handle the distance a lot better. Also incorporate hill repeats. It will make you tough."

Time on legs

Long distance runs are key, according to Meyer, but it is not necessary to prepare purely on a tar surface. Slower distance efforts need to be included in the training regimen of every aspiring marathon runner, because time spent on one's legs is a vital part of preparation. Speed work, however, also plays a part as it will make racing more comfortable.

"Incorporate time trials, park runs or longer intervals into your programme. It will help with running economy and you will feel a lot more comfortable at marathon race pace. Ideally you need to gradually build up from 10km to 21km to the marathon, but there are many people that pick a marathon as a challenge and just go for it. It depends on the individual and the personality," Meyer says.

Sanlam's chief medical advisor, Dr Pieter Coetzer, says experts agree that an active lifestyle contributes significantly towards a healthy life, both in terms of longevity and improved quality of life. This makes participation in an event such as the Sanlam Cape Town Marathon as much a lifestyle choice as a personal challenge.

"Endurance sports like road running improve not only one's physical health, but also mental health, leading to a better family

and work life. Among others, it has been shown to improve memory, physical abilities, self-confidence and contributes significantly to an optimistic attitude towards life and its challenges. We believe the sport of running is easily accessible and within most people's means. By its very nature, running requires determination, dedication and the belief that a lot can come from very little," says Dr Coetzer.

Muscle recovery

Training for the gruelling 42km challenge is important, but other areas of preparation are just as crucial, according to nutritional specialist, Andrea du Plessis. "The biggest impact nutrition can make on your training programme is to help your muscles recover rapidly. This ensures getting the best value out of regular training sessions," Du Plessis says.

Staying hydrated is important too, before, during and after exercise. While taking enough fluids is a wise approach, Du Plessis warns against excessive fluid intake. "This may result in over-hydration and hyponatremia, which may impair sports performance and can be as dangerous as dehydration."

When training in hot conditions, it is important to replace natural salts such as sodium and potassium. Sodium is widely available in our diets and does not need to be supplemented, so potassium is more important as a focus nutrient.

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