

Race Faster Tomorrow

Must-have advice for the critical 48 hours leading up to race day

The final two days before a race are very important. The workouts and logistical planning you do, the meals you eat, as well as the equipment and mental preparations you make during this window can have a major impact on your performance—for better or worse. So to get the most out of all the hard training you've already done, follow the advice in our 48-hour race countdown:



48 hours till race time . . . DO A SHORT, FAST WORKOUT

Your next-to-last workout before a race should be relatively easy and brief, so you're not fatigued on race morning. But it should include a dash of speed to prime your nervous system for competition.



47 hours till race time . . . START CARBO-LOADING

Research shows that one day of very high carbohydrate intake (4.5 grams of carbohydrate per pound of body weight) is sufficient to maximize muscle glycogen stores. But you might as well start two days out for good measure. The best time to start carbo-loading is right after your short, fast workout (see above), when your muscles are most receptive to glucose. Since it takes some work to consume 4.5 grams of carbs per pound of body weight in a single day, be sure to consume high-carb foods and beverages at every meal (think oatmeal and orange juice for breakfast, noodle soup for lunch, and a rice dish for dinner) and supplement with high-carb beverages such as Ensure between meals.



47 to 39 hours till race time . . . STAY OFF YOUR FEET

Avoid spending any unnecessary time on your feet today. The yard work can wait until next weekend!



31 hours till race time . . . **GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP**

Getting adequate sleep is critical to endurance performance at all times, but it is never more important than in the final days before a big race. In a recent British study, runners covered six percent less distance in a 30-minute time trial after being awake for 30 hours than they ran after a full night's rest. While that's pretty extreme sleep deprivation, even a few lost hours of rest could keep you from reaching your race goal. Yet, because of pre-race jitters and early-morning race starts, it can be difficult to get a full eight hours of shut-eye the night before a race. So be sure to get a good, long sleep two nights out.



22 hours till race time . . . **DO A SHORT, EASY WORKOUT**

A short, easy workout is better than none at all the day before a race. It relieves mental and physical tension and keeps the body primed for performance. A few brief bursts of activity at race pace or faster will enhance this priming effect. For example, a good final workout the day before a marathon is 15 minutes of easy jogging followed by four, 20-second bursts at roughly 5K race pace. If your big race is a triathlon, try to get in a little activity in each discipline, and string it all together in the same order as in the race itself. So, swim 10 minutes easy with a few short bursts, ride 10 minutes easy with a few more bursts, and finally hop off the bike and run easy for five minutes.



21 to 10 hours till race time . . . **KEEP CARBO-LOADING**

Maintain your high-carb diet throughout the last day before you race. Choose familiar foods that have always worked well for you in the past. Now is not the time to experiment.



20 hours till race time . . . **GATHER YOUR GEAR**

There's nothing worse than showing up at a race venue and realizing you forgot something important. To avoid this nightmarish experience, take some time to get all of your gear together now. It's best to create a race gear checklist that you use for every race. Go through it and check off each item before you travel to out-of-town races and go through it again on the morning before race day, so you have plenty of time to replace anything that's missing or fix anything that's not working.



18 hours till race time . . . **PLAN FOR RACE DAY**

Race-day logistics can be a pain in the neck, especially if you are not prepared. Minimize the hassle by making a concrete plan for race morning that includes a wake-up time, a route to the race venue, a parking site, and arrangements to get home after the race. Spend some time on the event Web site and/or looking over the race's official printed materials to gather all of the information you will need for a smooth race morning.



9 hours till race time . . . **VISUALIZE YOUR RACE**

Mental rehearsal, or visualization, is a powerful way to psychologically prepare for a race. After settling into bed, clear your mind and imagine the next morning's race as vividly as you can. Obviously, you can't go through the entire course in real time, so focus on critical parts such as the start, transitions (if your race is a triathlon), challenging hills, and so forth. Imagine moving with impeccable form and feeling strong, but not unrealistically so. Don't complete your mental rehearsal race miraculously free of fatigue. Instead, see yourself fighting through the fatigue.



3 hours till race time . . . **WAKE UP EARLY**

Research on the relationship between circadian rhythms and exercise performance suggests that optimal performance is not possible within a couple hours of waking up in the morning. So set an early alarm to give your body plenty of time to get up to speed. Try to climb out of bed at least three hours before the start horn blasts.



2 hours, **45** minutes till race time . . . **EAT YOUR PRE-RACE MEAL**

Nutrition is more critical than sleep on race morning, so make sure you wake up in plenty of time to eat and digest a high-carb pre-race breakfast. Aim to consume 75 to 100 grams of carbohydrate about three hours before your race start, or at least 50 grams two hours out.



2 hours, 15 minutes till race time . . . DOUBLE-CHECK YOUR EQUIPMENT

Before you leave home, go through your gear checklist and your actual gear one last time. Be sure not to forget the small essentials such as sunscreen, race number, and backup swim goggles.



30 minutes till race time . . . WARM UP THOROUGHLY

Start your warmup about half an hour before race time. Begin with easy jogging or spinning, then do some dynamic stretches such as walking lunges and arm circles, and finish with a few 20- to 30-second bursts at race pace.

Good luck!



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