



# Man's Best Friend Ate My Running Shoes ...

## and Other Reasons for Not Training for a Marathon

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UNLESS YOU'VE been living in a cave the last 20 years, you've probably seen, if not read, dozens of articles on reasons to run. Most of us know and appreciate the many physiological and psychological aspects of our lives enhanced by running. Sometimes, though, if you're like the rest of us, your motivation wanes. You find yourself in a slump, a valley of decrepitude, wallowing in sedentary contrariness, fed upon by the dreaded couch-potato virus—or, worse yet, the vile Internet-potato virus. Yes, that's you: [www.can'tgetoffmybutt.com](http://www.can'tgetoffmybutt.com). It can be difficult to extricate ourselves from the morass, and sometimes it's just plain impossible. What do we say on these occasions? How do we answer our seemingly sympathetic friends when they ask us why we're not running? Somehow the most honest response—"I just don't feel like it"—is the hardest to admit. We are *runners*, after all. Why in the world would we *not* want to run?

But there must be something we can say during our down times, something à la *MAD* magazine's snappy answers to stupid questions.

To help you through awkward times—should you ever suffer them—we're pleased to provide this list of the Top 10 Reasons for *Not* Training for a Marathon. We hope to save you time, energy, and frustration and cut down on those long, clumsy explanations (*well, you see, it's not that anything's wrong exactly ... it's just that, well, you know, I've been extra busy with work, and my kids are at the age when they need extra time, and, well, it's just hard to fit everything in, so something had to, you know, go ...*)

## THE TOP 10

### Reason #10: Culinary

*"Man's best friend ate my running shoes."*

Your running shoes are minding their own business when your "best friend" catches a fragrant aroma that reminds him it's time for lunch. The scent of your favorite, loyal, overworn running shoes is so enticing that poor Rover can't resist a bite or two before striking rubber. Since few of us have trained to run Abebe Bikila-style, what do we do now?

*Options:* get new shoes . . . take your dog for a run (*he* doesn't mind going barefoot!) . . . get a new "best friend" . . . buy stock in Nike or Reebok (or New Balance or Asics or Brooks or Puma or Adidas or Etonic—we're *not* playing favorites here) and enjoy the perks.

By the way, once you get new shoes, it's probably a good idea to hide them and save your old ones for your scruffy friend. They taste better anyway.



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## Reason #9: Ecological

### *New running fad—recycle your sweat!*

Most runners shower twice a day. At about 15 gallons per shower (and that's a *short* shower), you use 30 gallons or more of pristine life-enhancing liquidity. If you go without showering, the 200 gallons of water you save a week (over 10,000 gallons for the year) could form a small pond. The 50,000 marathoners who ran in the centennial at Boston could have made a lake if they all agreed to skip their postrace showers.

Of course, while we saved water we'd also be increasing our damage to the ozone, as each unshowered runner would go through at least two cans of aerosol antiperspirant per month. Quite a quagmire! Here's a solution: run only in the morning before your daily shower, thereby cutting your number of showers in half. This will not only save water and the ozone (not to mention hand soap) but is more time efficient. Besides, who needs to smell good for a run?

## Reason #8: Fashionable

### *No more T-shirts! Organize a Ban the T-Shirt Run.*

Alas, you've finally reached the point where your drawers and closets will not hold even one more T-shirt, and you have sworn to your family and friends that you will not run another step until you rehabilitate your T-shirt collection. Perhaps your spouse has given you an ultimatum: "Not one more T-shirt will enter this house!"

Unfortunately, nonrunners don't understand that T-shirts are critically important to runners, so what's a runner to do? Try these space-saving tips:

1. Turn the worst, most raggedy shirts into rags (you can reminisce about your favorite runs as you scrub the floor).
2. Give T-shirts to family and friends as gifts, stressing that each shirt was earned the hard way and is reeking with sentimental value.
3. Give shirts away to family to use as sleepwear (remember to get into the habit of getting XL).
4. Give shirts to charity—you'll glow with the generosity of helping a good cause.
5. Have some of your most-treasured T-shirts turned into a commemorative quilt. Then on those cold winter nights you can warm up in the musky smell of old sweat (hey, some people pay good money for that scent!).

## Reason #7: Prudent

### *I'm not old! I'm chronologically gifted!*

We know some of you think you're not getting older, just better, but you need to face the fact that Father Time runs faster than any of us. Now that you're slowing down, take a *real* break—take time to stop and smell the flowers. Those of us who are daily becoming more chronologically gifted may take longer to recover from those long training runs, but if a 90-year-old can finish a marathon (see the race list of the 1997 New York City Marathon), then your aging excuse begins to sound flimsy.

It may take us a bit longer to get to the finish line, or to get started on our regular training runs, and perhaps we enjoy talking more about our aches and pains and bowel movements than the younger set, but just think of all the advantages those years of experience give us. Sure, we may sometimes feel like that cartoon with the runner and the grim reaper, who's saying, "I've come for your knees."

Cross-training may help, as will thinking about all the physiological and psychological benefits you're getting from running regularly. And think of all those age groups we're aging into and might be able to win since there will be fewer competitors our age still around (or still alive). That 90-year-old at New York had no competition.

## Reason #6: Versatile

### *I've decided to spice up my life.*

If you average 50 miles a week for 12 weeks at 7:30 pace plus 15 minutes for warm-up/cool-down, shower, and dressing, you'll spend roughly 6,000 minutes (or 100 hours) training. That's a lot of blown nap time.

For those who know that variety is the spice of life, assuming cross-training doesn't fill the bill for you, here are some things to do with your extra time now that you've decided not to train for a marathon. (Of course, we assume you're still running, even if not at marathon level.)

1. Read a classic novel, such as *War and Peace* (not the Classic-Comic edition).
2. Do a 2,000-piece jigsaw puzzle with no flat pieces and every piece pure black.
3. If you do that, try solving a bigger puzzle, such as feeding all the hungry (extra points for the Nobel Peace Prize).
4. Declare peace on a war (keep notes so you can repeat the process as needed).

5. Declare war on a former lover.
6. Make love, not war. Don't worry, it'll all come back.
7. Show more interest in a loved one's interest—this has many rewards.
8. Interest a loved one in reading *War and Peace*.
9. Interest a loved one in making peace.
10. Interest a peaceful one in making love.

There you have it. As you see, there's never a reason to get stuck in a rut.

### Reason #5: Pregnant

#### *Great news, honey—a new training strategy!*

Actually, marathon training is a good strategy for avoiding pregnancy—in many ways:

1. No time
2. Too tired
3. Low sperm count
4. Body fat too low (may result in amenorrhea)
5. Sore muscles

On the other foot, some consider getting pregnant as a training strategy (though we don't recommend this), as pregnancy adds considerable stress on the body. Thus, you can increase the stress levels of your training without leaving town.

Of course, if you haven't been running before you got pregnant, starting while pregnant is generally not recommended. But if you've been running all along, many women have found it possible to continue running well into their pregnancy (always see your doctor, though, to be sure that running is OK for you while pregnant).

### Reason #4: Parenting

#### *The family that sweats together sticks together!*

It's time to design your family racing logo and come up with a slogan. Something like, *Run with us . . . or be run out of the house!*

Getting organized to run as a family can be challenging, especially for new parents. Unless your spouse is a runner and you can share time and family responsibilities with the understanding that running is a priority, the response you'll get might be, "Running again! I need help with the baby!" As soon as the baby is old enough, a jog stroller is a terrific solution, getting both you and the baby into the fresh air.

Remember Hercules's training principle. Every day Hercules lifted a baby calf. As the calf grew, so did Hercules's strength. We don't recommend running with your children strapped to your back, but that jog stroller will become increasingly heavy as the baby grows, maximizing your training (and your bonding) while keeping your mileage low.

As years pass, try to lull your children into loving the jog stroller—maybe you can avoid the cost of an extra car and car insurance while the kids are in high school.

### Reason #3: Injured

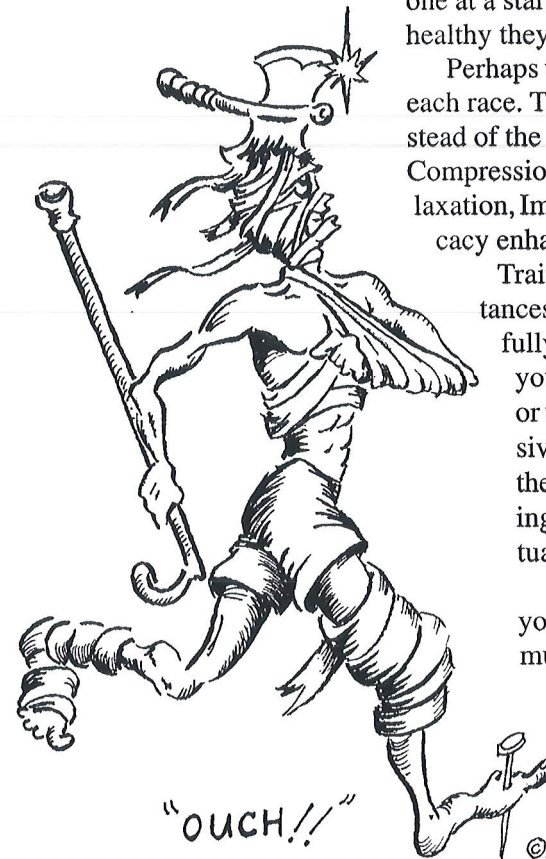
#### *I pulled my quads while thinking about my biceps.*

Runners are notorious for trying to run through nagging injuries. After all, who is ever 100 percent healthy and ready to race at top form? You ever hear someone at a starting line talk about how fit and healthy they are?

Perhaps we need a psychologist's tent at each race. The Doctor Is In. Five cents. Instead of the usual RICE therapy (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation), we could try Relaxation, Imagery, Concentration, and Efficacy enhancement.

Training for and running long distances can magnify injuries beautifully. For example, if your toe hurts, your stride might be altered. Over- or understriding can lead to excessive hyaline cartilage wear under the patella. Chronic pain and grinding over the next decade will eventually lead to knee replacement.

Swinging your arms will twist your back, resulting in potential muscle fatigue, forcing the discs to bear the brunt of impact pressure, resulting in disc herniation or rupture. It hurts just to think about it. Rules of thumb, then: "When in doubt, sit it out!" and "Live to run another day!"



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## Reason #2: Bored

### *I'd rather watch the food channel.*

Blasphemy! Not possible! But, alas, this happens even to the best of us. Sometimes we find that we don't enjoy the level of training we need to do to run a marathon, or even to run at all. Some people even begin to think that running is b-o-r-i-n-g!

We know this is rarely the case, but perhaps those rarer occasions become more frequent. (Refer to #6 for suggestions.) Cross-training is always recommended to shift interests, at least partially, toward other activities.

You could always try "the shower phenomenon" for variety as well. The shower phenomenon suggests that the psychological benefits we get from running come not from the run itself but from the shower we take afterward. So, change into your sweats, hang out for a half-hour or so, and then step into the steam and luxuriate in the sensations of a wonderful shower. Imagine you're under a warm waterfall in the tropics. You'll agree it's a terrific refresher.

If your interest has waned for running, it's probably best to take a break for a while. Just think of the phase as an extended rest day (recommended highly in most training programs), even if it becomes a rest month or so.

Use the time to escape into some really serious imagining. Imagine yourself running, and running well, even though you're not actually doing it.

Let your zest for running, the intense physical pleasure that comes from those long strides, the euphoric runner's high that envelopes you, the beautiful countryside, communing with nature, becoming one with the universe . . . well, you get the idea.

There will be many more marathons in the future, and saving yourself for another day is better than forcing something you really don't want to do.

## LAST BUT NOT LEAST (DRUMROLL, PLEASE)

## Reason #1: Busy

### *How can I squeeze a 60-minute run into 45 minutes?*

This is the most frequently cited reason for not running. Is running taking more time than it used to? Are 25 hours in the day not enough? Has your one-hour run become a two-hour run? Where does the time go?

If you want to see time fly, you don't have to throw a clock out the window—just use the front door and run more frequently.

Instead of running for two hours at a clip, try running 40 minutes two to three times a day (but see #9 above if you shower after each run).

Marathoners will be affected by the time factor only if life changes and responsibilities increase unexpectedly. An understanding spouse or boss can be helpful here, but there are degrees to their understanding of our need to run.

Your choices are limited: find a more understanding spouse or boss. Sleep less. Improve time-management skills. Or increase the number of hours in the typical day (please contact us when you accomplish this one and we'll finance you).

Sometimes we do the best we can, and when added responsibilities at work come along, or when there's a new baby in the house, it's best simply to skip the next marathon and point to one farther down the road. After all, life's journey is one of many steps, many runs, many races. Passing up a race now to get some important things done may actually help in the long run. And it really is about the long run, isn't it?

We hope these suggestions have been helpful, and that these excuses . . . er . . . *reasons* will hit the spot the next time that "helpful" friend asks you why you're not running today. We all need a break sometimes, although others don't seem to know that. In the meantime, enjoy your time off. Better yet, enjoy getting back to running and the joy it brings to all of us!

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