

# Marathon 2026 Training & Nutrition Plan

**Overview:** You have just over a year (13 months) to transform your fitness and weight in order to run the NYC Marathon on Nov 1, 2026 in under 6 hours. This comprehensive plan is divided into phases, each with specific goals for running, diet (low-carb nutrition), intermittent fasting (with occasional extended fasts), and strength training. By progressing gradually and safely, you'll build endurance, lose excess weight, and stay motivated without burnout. *Importantly, we will emphasize weight loss and habit-building in the early phases (off-season/base training) so that when marathon-specific training begins, you are lighter and better conditioned* <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>. Each phase outlines clear objectives and manageable steps. Let's get started!

## Phase 1: Off-Season Reset (Oct – Dec 2025)

**Focus:** Jumpstart weight loss and establish a fitness routine. In this phase, you will adopt a low-carb diet with intermittent fasting, attempt your first short extended fasts, and build a running base with easy mileage. Strength training begins at a light level. *The priority is improving your metabolic health and shedding some weight before intensive training, without over-stressing your body.*

- **Goals:** Lose approximately **1–2 pounds per week** (aim for ~12–20 lbs over 3 months) <sup>3</sup>, increase weekly running mileage gradually (from ~10 miles/week to ~15+ miles/week by December), and **establish a consistent workout schedule** (3–4 days/week). This will improve your aerobic base while protecting against injury. Achieving a noticeable fitness milestone – for example, comfortably running a 5K without walking or cutting your 15:00 min/mi pace down to ~13:00–14:00 on shorter runs – can boost motivation.
- **Running Plan: Train 3 days per week**, focusing on easy effort and run/walk as needed. At the start, use **walking breaks generously** – e.g. jog 2-3 minutes, walk 1 minute, repeat – to accumulate 30–45 minutes of aerobic exercise. This run/walk approach is ideal for overweight runners and helps you safely build endurance without injury <sup>4</sup>. Each week, **increase your total running time or distance by no more than ~10%** <sup>5</sup>. Your longest run might be ~4–6 miles in October, building to ~8 miles by December. Don't worry about speed; keep **all runs at a comfortable, conversational pace** (Zone 1–2 heart rate). This encourages fat-burning and aerobic development. It's okay (even recommended) to **incorporate brisk walking or very easy jogs for long sessions** – endurance is the goal now, not intensity. Every 3rd or 4th week, plan a “cutback” week where you reduce mileage a bit to let your body rest and adapt (this helps prevent burnout and injuries). By the end of Phase 1, aim to complete a long run of ~8 miles at an easy pace (or a 2-hour easy run/walk session) – this will set a foundation for longer distances later. Optionally, consider signing up for a **5K or 10K fun run in December** to practice running in an event setting; treat it as a relaxed training run to gauge your progress and stay motivated.
- **Nutrition (Low-Carb) & Daily Fasting:** Begin a **low-carb, high-nutrient diet** focusing on vegetables, lean proteins, and healthy fats. You don't need to go full keto, but try to **limit sugars and refined carbs sharply**. Aim for complex carbs (like vegetables, some fruits, maybe a small portion of whole grains) and prioritize protein and healthy fats to keep you full. A reasonable target

might be ~50–100g of carbohydrates per day initially – low enough to induce fat-burning while still providing some energy. **Intermittent fasting (IF)** will be a key tool. Start with a **16:8 IF schedule** (for example, finish dinner by 7pm and then don't eat until ~11am the next day). Have black coffee, tea, or water in the morning – no calories during the fasting window <sup>6</sup>. This eating window naturally curbs late-night snacking and reduces overall calorie intake, helping weight loss <sup>7</sup>. Many people find 16:8 IF sustainable for daily use, but listen to your energy levels. If 16 hours feels too hard at first, ease in with 14-hour fasts and build up to 16. **Focus on nutrition quality:** During eating windows, **don't binge**. Consume balanced meals with plenty of protein, fiber, and healthy fats to promote satiety (e.g. eggs or Greek yogurt for breakfast/brunch, salad with chicken/avocado for lunch, meat or fish with veggies for dinner). Since you'll be low-carb, remember to drink water and consider extra electrolytes (e.g. add a pinch of salt or have broth) – this helps prevent the “keto flu” or fatigue as your body adapts to fewer carbs <sup>8</sup>.

- **Extended Fasting for Metabolic Reset:** In Phase 1, you can cautiously **experiment with longer fasts**, but schedule them wisely so they don't interfere with training. Early off-season is an ideal time for this <sup>9</sup>. For example, in November or December, attempt a **24- to 48-hour fast** (i.e. eat dinner, then fast until next day's dinner or the day after). Ensure you stay **hydrated with water, herbal tea, and electrolytes** (sodium, potassium) during any fast. Plan these fasts for weeks when your running is light – **do NOT try to do hard workouts or long runs in the middle of a multi-day fast** <sup>10</sup>. (Walking and gentle activity are fine, but intense exercise should be avoided during prolonged fasting periods <sup>10</sup>.) If the 1–2 day fasts go well, you might attempt a **3-day fast** in December for a deeper “reset.” However, **approach any 3-5 day fast with caution:** as research shows, endurance performance and high-intensity capacity decline after ~2–3 days of zero food <sup>11</sup>. In practical terms this means you'll likely feel weak and unable to train normally during a long fast – which is okay *if you plan for it*. Schedule at least **one full rest week** (or very low-intensity week with just light walking or yoga) to coincide with a 3-5 day fast, so that you aren't compromising key training. It's important to **re-feed carefully** after an extended fast: when you resume eating, start with a small, gentle meal (like broth, a salad or steamed veggies and some protein) to avoid shocking your system. Overall, these extended fasts in Phase 1 can accelerate weight loss and improve insulin sensitivity, giving your “metabolically broken” body a fresh start – but always prioritize safety and listen to your body. *If at any point you feel dizzy, excessively fatigued, or unwell during a fast, stop and re-feed with a light meal.*

- **Strength Training:** With a gym membership at your disposal, Phase 1 is the time to establish a **basic strength routine** to support your running. Aim for **2 short strength workouts per week** (for example, Monday and Wednesday after your runs, or on separate days if you prefer). These sessions can be about 30 minutes each – you can even split your 1-hour gym times into 30 min running + 30 min strength. Focus on **compound, full-body exercises** that build functional strength for running. Key areas: legs (quads, hamstrings, glutes), core, and upper body. For example, you might do: *body-weight or light dumbbell squats, lunges, hip bridges, planks* (core), *push-ups* or chest press, and *lat pull-downs or dumbbell rows* for your back. Don't worry about heavy lifting now – start with moderate weights and higher reps to ingrain proper form. **Consistency is more important than intensity** at this stage. Strength training will not only help you avoid muscle imbalances and injuries, but also **increase your resting metabolism by building muscle mass** <sup>12</sup> (muscle burns more calories at rest, aiding fat loss <sup>13</sup>). One big benefit: unlike long cardio sessions, strength workouts won't spike your appetite as much <sup>14</sup>, so they're an excellent complement to your weight-loss efforts. **Note:** On days when you do both running and strength, do the running first (so your legs aren't too fatigued) and keep the strength session light to moderate. The goal is to **build a habit** and prepare your body

for harder strength work later, not to leave you excessively sore. Always allow at least 48 hours between strength sessions for recovery (e.g. Mon & Thu, or Tue & Sat splits work too).

- **Lifestyle & Motivation:** In this kickstart phase, progress can be rapid, which is very motivating. Track your workouts (distance, pace, how you felt) and track your fasting/diet compliance and your weight weekly. *Celebrate small wins:* each 5-pound loss, each mile added to your long run, or each time you shave some seconds off your mile pace is a victory. It might help to **set a reward** for yourself at the end of Phase 1 – for example, *treat yourself to new running shoes or gear* once you've lost your first 15 pounds or stuck to the plan for three months (non-food rewards are best to reinforce your healthy habits <sup>15</sup>). Also, prioritize **sleep and stress management** – adequate sleep will improve fat loss and recovery. By the end of December, you should notice significant improvements: expect to be lighter, have better control over your eating (reduced cravings due to low-carb & IF), and feel fitter. You'll be ready to take on more running in the new year!

## Phase 2: Base Building & Continued Fat Loss (Jan – Mar 2026)

**Focus:** Build a strong aerobic base and further reduce weight, while gradually increasing running frequency and mileage. You'll maintain a low-carb, IF lifestyle (with potentially one more extended fast early on if needed), but as running volume increases, we'll ensure you're **fueling adequately around key workouts** so performance isn't compromised <sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup>. Strength training continues regularly. This phase sets you up to transition from “getting in shape” to **true endurance training**.

- **Goals:** Continue losing weight at a **safe, steady pace (~1 lb per week)** through the winter – by March, you could be down another ~10–12+ pounds (possibly more if Phase 1 went well). By the end of Phase 2, aim to be roughly **20–30 pounds lighter** than your October starting weight – this will significantly improve your running pace and reduce impact on your joints. In running, the goal is to increase your weekly mileage from ~15 mpw toward **20–25 miles per week** by March. You'll also increase the long run distance and begin incorporating a bit more variety (like gentle **speed drills or hill workouts**) to develop strength and faster leg turnover. By March, you should be capable of running a **half marathon distance (13.1 miles)** in training, or very close – we will plan a practice half-marathon at the end of this phase as a milestone. Hitting that 13-mile mark will build huge confidence for the full marathon <sup>18</sup>. Another key goal: solidify your routine of 4 exercise days per week (3 runs + 1 dedicated strength or cross-training day). This phase is about consistency and gradual expansion of your comfort zone.
- **Running Plan: Increase to 4 days per week of training** (if your schedule allows 4; if not, 3 run days with an added short cross-training day). A sample week could be: **Monday – Easy Run + Strength, Wednesday – Run (could be a slightly faster/skill workout), Friday – Easy Run, Sunday – Long Run**. Here's how to structure it:
- **Easy Runs (Mon & Fri):** These are 30–45 minute easy jogs (Zone 2 effort). They add mileage and aid recovery. By now, you might find you can jog continuously for much longer without walk breaks, especially at an easy pace. (If you still prefer run/walk, that's fine – gradually extend the run portions.) These runs burn fat, condition your aerobic system, and help your body adapt to more frequent running.
- **Quality Run (Wed):** Once a week, introduce a light **quality workout**. In February, for example, you might add *hill repeats* or short *intervals* during one run. **Hill repeats** could be: after a 10-minute

warm-up jog, run up a moderate hill for ~30 seconds at a hard but controlled effort, then walk back down to recover, repeat 5–6 times. Hills build leg strength and cardio without requiring high speed (plus they are easier on joints than flat sprints). Alternatively, **intervals on flat ground** could be: warm up 10 min, then do 4 x (2 minutes faster run, 2 minutes easy jog recovery). These “moderate” intensity efforts (tempo or fartlek-style) will start improving your aerobic capacity and help burn extra calories <sup>19</sup>. Importantly, **keep these efforts controlled** – you should finish feeling you could do a bit more, not completely exhausted. *Effort guideline:* think of a “7 out of 10” effort (hard breathing but not all-out sprint). As the weeks go by, you can very gradually increase the number or length of intervals (e.g. 3 minutes fast / 2 min recovery, or add an extra rep) <sup>20</sup> <sup>21</sup>. Speed work is a powerful tool for fitness and fat loss (high-intensity intervals can efficiently burn calories and even target belly fat) <sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup>, but it’s also higher injury risk, so progress carefully and **never on back-to-back days**. Always follow a hard day with an easy/rest day.

- **Long Run (Sunday):** Continue lengthening your long run. In Phase 2, you’ll take your weekend long run from ~8 miles up to ~13 miles by late March. Use the **10% rule or add ~1 mile each week** (some weeks might be +1.5 miles if you’re feeling strong, but occasionally step back or plateau for a week to consolidate). For example: if you did 8 miles at end of Dec, aim for 9 mi in early Jan, 10 mi mid-Jan, then maybe drop to 8 mi on a recovery week, then 11, 12, etc. Plan a “cutback” every 3rd or 4th week where the long run is shorter (e.g., 8 → 9 → 10 → 7 miles, then 11 → 12 → 13 → 10 miles). **By the end of March, schedule a practice half-marathon run** – ideally by entering a local **Half Marathon race** around that time. This can be an organized race or simply you running 13.1 miles on your own or with a partner. Don’t worry about speed; treat it as a catered training run. The goal is to **experience the distance** and gauge your endurance. Completing a half marathon in, say, the 2:50–3:15 range (or faster if able) would put you on track for the sub-6 marathon with continued training, but even if it’s slower, finishing the distance is what counts. Expect that your long run pace might naturally speed up as you lose weight – but always prioritize finishing the distance at a steady effort over going fast.
- **Cross-Training (if time):** If you can squeeze a 4th or 5th day of light activity, consider cycling, swimming, or using the elliptical on one of your “rest” days for 30–45 minutes. This can burn extra calories and boost fitness *without the impact* of running. It’s optional, but can help weight loss. For example, a brisk bike ride on Saturday if your long run is Sunday, or a short swim on Tuesday – just keep it low to moderate intensity so it doesn’t interfere with recovery.

By the end of Phase 2, your weekly routine should be quite solid. You’re running more frequently and your long run is at half-marathon length – a terrific achievement. The consistent aerobic training will significantly improve your fat-burning engine and endurance.

- **Nutrition & Fasting:** Continue with the **low-carb eating** approach, but be prepared to **adjust carb intake slightly upward around your harder training days if needed**. As mileage increases, some runners find they need more carbs for energy – but you can manage this through **targeted or cyclic carbs** rather than reverting to a high-carb diet. For instance, on the evening *before* a long run or your Wednesday workout, you might include a bit of starch (e.g. a small sweet potato or a cup of quinoa) or fruit in your dinner. This gives a gentle glycogen boost for the next day’s effort. Another strategy is **Targeted Carbs**: have a small quick-carb snack *right before or during* a hard workout – e.g. half a banana or a gel 30 minutes before your intervals or long run – to improve performance without breaking your overall low-carb fat-adaptation <sup>24</sup>. ~20–30 g of fast-acting carbs before intense sessions can sharpen your training, and you’ll burn through it quickly <sup>25</sup>. On your easy days and rest days, stick to very low carb intake to maximize fat burn. Essentially, **fuel with intention**: eat slightly more carbs only when they benefit your training, and stay low-carb the rest of the time <sup>26</sup>.

This kind of **carb cycling** (sometimes called a cyclical keto approach) is used by many endurance athletes: for example, going low-carb Monday–Friday and having a controlled carb refeed on Saturday to replenish glycogen for a Sunday long run <sup>26</sup>. You can experiment to see what makes you feel best. If you notice heavy fatigue or poor recovery, it might be a sign to modestly increase healthy carbs on training days (e.g. extra veggies, some fruit, or legumes), but *avoid processed sugars and junk food*.

**Intermittent fasting** should remain part of your routine if you're comfortable. Many runners successfully train in a fasted state for easy runs, which can enhance fat utilization. For example, you might do your Monday and Friday easy runs in the morning before eating (just have water or coffee). However, **for the long runs and intense workouts, it's usually wise to eat beforehand or have a good meal after if the workout was fasted** <sup>16</sup>. Listen to your energy levels: if you feel lightheaded or weak, don't push a fasted workout – break your fast early that day. By now you'll know if 16:8 is working for you. If weight loss has stalled and you feel up for it, you could try an **18:6 fasting window** a few days a week (tighten the eating window to 6 hours).

Regarding **extended fasts**: since your training load is rising, it's best **not to do any prolonged (3+ day) fasts during heavy training** <sup>27</sup> <sup>10</sup>. In Phase 2, you might squeeze in *one more* extended fast *only if needed* and only in a **low-training week**. For example, early January could be relatively light as you ease back in after the holidays – that might be an opportunity for a 3-day fast if you didn't do one yet or want to do another to accelerate fat loss. But again, **do not train hard during such a fast** – take it as a recovery week with perhaps just gentle walks or stretching <sup>10</sup>. Beyond January, your priority is fueling training, so focus primarily on IF daily or the 5:2 style fasting (e.g. occasionally having a very low-calorie day once a week) rather than multi-day fasts. Remember, **gradual weight loss of ~0.5–1 lb/week** is ideal while training <sup>3</sup>; don't try to crash-diet during this phase, as it could harm your workouts and recovery.

- **Strength & Conditioning:** By Phase 2, you should be comfortable with basic strength exercises, so you can **increase the challenge slightly**. Continue strength training **2 times per week** if possible (or at least once per week if very busy). You can now incorporate moderately heavier weights or more challenging bodyweight moves. Emphasize core and leg strength for running power and injury prevention. Good additions might be: *step-ups onto a bench*, *Romanian deadlifts* (start light to strengthen hamstrings and glutes), *lunges with dumbbells*, *planks with variations (side planks, etc.)*, *glute bridges*, and upper body moves like *rows*, *overhead presses*, or *assisted pull-ups*. Keep the routine balanced (push, pull, squat, core, etc.). **Duration can remain ~30 minutes per session**, focusing on quality over quantity. Since your running volume is higher now, you may feel more fatigued; it's okay to reduce strength volume a bit (fewer sets) to avoid overtraining. The priority is consistency – **regular strength work will pay off by improving your running economy and protecting against injuries** <sup>14</sup> <sup>12</sup>. Also, by building muscle, you're keeping your metabolism high as you lose fat. Many marathon plans for beginners skimp on strength, but it's excellent that you're doing it – it will help you “run strong” and maintain form even as you fatigue in long runs. **Scheduling tip:** try to separate hard run days from hard lift days. For example, do strength on Monday (with only an easy run that day) and Thursday (which might be a non-running or very easy day). Avoid heavy leg lifting the day before a long run or speed session. If you must combine, do a lighter full-body circuit that day rather than a super heavy lift.

- **Recovery & Health:** As training ramps up, pay attention to recovery basics: **proper hydration**, **good sleep** (aim 7–9 hours/night), and adequate protein intake (to repair muscles). Even though you're low-carb, make sure you're getting enough calories and protein to sustain muscle. A good rule is at

least **0.7–0.8 grams of protein per pound of body weight** – with your weight dropping, that might be around 180–200g protein initially, decreasing proportionally as you lose weight. High protein helps preserve muscle while losing fat. Continue to avoid sugar and junk most of the time, but you can include *occasional* high-quality carb refuels as mentioned (think brown rice, sweet potato, fruit) to support training – just keep portions moderate and directly tied to workout needs <sup>28</sup> . If you haven't already, consider taking a **daily multivitamin or specific supplements** (like vitamin D, B12, omega-3, etc.) especially if you're fasting and eating at a calorie deficit, to ensure you don't develop any deficiencies while training hard <sup>29</sup> <sup>30</sup> . Consult your doctor or a dietitian about this if possible.

- **Motivation & Milestones:** Winter training can be tough, but keep your eyes on the prize. **Use the half-marathon at the end of March as a big motivator** – perhaps register for an official race. Having that event on the calendar often keeps people focused. Each week, note something positive: maybe your 5-mile run that used to feel hard now feels easy, or you notice your clothes fitting looser. These are signs of progress. Continue to reward yourself for consistency – e.g., get a massage or a new piece of running gear after the half-marathon or after hitting a weight milestone. By the end of Phase 2, you'll likely be feeling much fitter: running 4 days a week, long runs over 10 miles, and quite a few pounds lighter. You're building **serious momentum** toward your marathon goal.

### Phase 3: Transition to Marathon Training (Apr – Jun 2026)

**Focus:** In this phase, you shift from general base training to more focused preparation for the marathon training cycle ahead. You will keep building mileage and start doing longer runs beyond the half-marathon distance. It's also time to gradually **dial in your race-day nutrition strategy** (how you fuel during long runs), since you'll be doing some 15+ mile runs. We will continue weight loss efforts, but by now your weight may be much closer to a healthy range – the emphasis will slowly move from losing weight to **maintaining energy for training**. Motivation is kept high by potentially entering some spring/early summer races and seeing performance improvements.

- **Goals:** By June, aim to reach your **goal racing weight or close to it**. Based on your starting point (6'2", 290 lbs in Oct 2025), a realistic goal might be to get down to, say, **230–240 lbs by the start of marathon-specific training in July 2026**. (This is an estimate; the more weight you lose healthily, the easier running will become – but even around 240, you'll have shed 50 lbs which is a huge achievement.) If you find your weight loss naturally slows as you approach this range (which is normal), don't stress – *performance, health, and how you feel are what count now*. In terms of running: increase your weekly mileage into the **25–30 miles per week** range by June. By the end of Phase 3, your long run should be up to **15–16 miles** at least once, possibly even 18 miles if all is going well. However, these long runs will be done at an easy pace (likely incorporating walk breaks) to build endurance safely. Another goal is to **improve your running pace** at various distances – as you lose weight and train, it's very feasible that your easy pace might improve by 1–3 minutes per mile compared to when you started. For instance, by June you might find your comfortable long run pace is, say, ~13:00–14:00 min/mile (down from ~15:00+). We will also aim for at least one shorter race (like a 10K or 10-mile race) to test your speed and keep you motivated. Finally, ensure by the end of June that you are **injury-free and feeling strong** – ready to tackle the intensive marathon program next.
- **Running Plan: Frequency:** 4 run days per week consistently (with an optional 5th day of cross-training if desired). By now, your body should handle running on back-to-back days occasionally, but

continue to avoid stacking two very hard runs in a row. A typical week could look like: **Mon – Easy run, Tue – rest or cross-training, Wed – Moderate/hill or speed run, Thu – Easy run or cross-training, Fri – rest, Sat – Long run, Sun – rest (or very light recovery jog/bike)**. You can adjust days, but aim for the same pattern of 2 harder runs (Wed & long run) and 2 truly easy runs.

- **Long Runs:** This phase sees your long runs **surpass the half marathon distance**. In April, after your recovery from the March half, start extending again: e.g. 14 miles, 12 (cutback), 15, 16, 13 (cutback), 17, etc. You don't necessarily need to go beyond ~18 miles in Phase 3 – you can save the 20 miler for Phase 4 – but hitting 16–18 miles by early summer will give you a huge confidence and endurance base. Keep practicing **fueling and hydration** on these long runs: since you're low-carb adapted, you might find you can do moderate-paced long runs without tons of carbs, but for anything over ~2 hours it's wise to take in some nutrition. Experiment with during-run fuel that suits low-carb: options include **electrolyte drinks**, small amounts of **MCT oil or nut butter** based snacks, **low-carb energy gels** (there are some on the market), or even a bit of regular carbs if tolerated (some marathoners who eat low-carb still consume ~30-50g carbs per hour during races to maintain blood sugar). See what your stomach tolerates; *the golden rule: don't try anything new on race day*, so practice now. Many runners use a gel every 45 minutes in long runs – you might adapt this by using half a gel (about 10-15g carbs) every 30 minutes after the first hour, and see how you feel. Also, **carry water** or plan routes where you can refill – staying hydrated is crucial, especially as weather warms towards summer. By doing these long runs, you're effectively in “marathon shape” already by mid-year, which means Phase 4 can be about sharpening and ensuring you hit race day strong.
- **Mid-Week Workout:** Continue weekly “quality” sessions, advancing them carefully. Now that you have a solid base, you could introduce a more structured **tempo run** every other week. For example, a **tempo run** might be: 1 mile easy, then 3 miles at a “comfortably hard” pace (perhaps around your 10K race effort or a pace you could hold for an hour), then 1 mile easy. Tempo runs improve your lactate threshold and make marathon pace feel easier <sup>21 31</sup>. Alternatively, on other weeks do **intervals** that are a bit longer: e.g. 4 x 5 minutes fast with 2-3 min jog recoveries, or ladder sets like 3-4-5-4-3 minutes at a hard pace with equal recoveries. These workouts build speed and stamina. Given your low-carb preference, you may feel a bit sluggish on intense days – if so, remember the **targeted carb trick (a little fruit or half gel before the workout)** <sup>24</sup>. Overall, the mid-week workouts should boost your **VO<sub>2</sub> max and foot turnover**. As always, **warm up and cool down thoroughly** on these days (10-15 min easy jog before and after). If at any point you feel injuries or excessive fatigue creeping in, cut back the intensity – the priority is staying healthy for the marathon.
- **Easy/Recovery Runs:** With higher mileage, the easy runs (Mon & Thu in our example) remain very important. Do them *very easy* – even slower than your long run pace if you like, or even as walk/jog if you're sore. Their purpose is blood flow, aiding recovery while still adding a bit of mileage. You can keep them at ~3-5 miles each. If you're feeling strong, one of those days could be used for a **shorter “marathon pace” run**: e.g. 4-5 miles where you practice running at your goal marathon pace (~13:30 min/mi to break 6 hours). But this is optional and only if you're feeling good – practicing goal pace can help you lock in the feel of it.
- **Races for Motivation:** Consider signing up for a **10K or 15K race in April or May**, and/or a **20K (12.4mi) or another Half Marathon in June**. These can serve as tune-ups. For example, running a 10K race will give you a good sense of your improved speed. You might surprise yourself (perhaps running a 10K in, say, 1:10–1:20 if all goes well). Racing occasionally keeps things fun and competitive. Just be sure to not race all-out too frequently; use some events as supported training

runs if needed. Also, **practice race-day routines** in these events: what you eat the night before, breakfast timing (if any, given IF – you may need to break the fast on race mornings to have some fuel), warming up, and how you handle nerves. All this practice will reduce anxiety on the big marathon day.

- **Nutrition & Weight Management:** By now, you are likely noticeably leaner. Keep up your **nutritious low-carb diet**, but be mindful that as you approach a healthier weight, your calorie deficit may need to be smaller to continue losing fat. It's normal if weight loss slows down now – your body might even plateau for a bit as it adjusts. **Avoid extreme caloric restriction** at this stage, because your training load is high and you need to **fuel your workouts and recovery** <sup>32</sup>. Aim to eat at roughly a **300-500 calorie per day deficit at most** if you still want to lose a bit more fat <sup>33</sup>. One effective tactic: continue to **trim calories from evening meals** especially on non-training days <sup>34</sup> – e.g., have a lighter, high-protein dinner – but **never skimp on your post-workout nutrition**. After hard runs, ensure you get protein and some carbs to help muscle recovery and glycogen replenishment. For instance, after a 16-mile run, even if you're low-carb, you might have a recovery shake (20-30g protein plus maybe 20g carbs from fruit or milk) or a balanced meal. Your body will soak up those nutrients for recovery without derailing fat loss, because your metabolism is roaring after long exercise.

Continue **intermittent fasting** if it fits your lifestyle and doesn't leave you drained in workouts. Many find that skipping breakfast (or just having coffee) and then doing an easy run works well, but for longer runs (over 2 hours) you'll likely want to eat beforehand. You might adjust your fasting schedule on training days: for example, on long run day, eat a good hearty breakfast (with carbs and protein) in the morning, do your long run, and then you could start a 16-hour fast after an early dinner that evening going into the next day (which might be a rest day). *Flexibility is key:* align your fasting periods so they don't coincide with the times you most need fuel for training <sup>16</sup>. If you haven't tried a **5:2 fasting** approach (where two days a week you eat only ~25% of normal calories, and normal eating the other 5 days) <sup>35</sup>, you could experiment with that on lighter training days as an alternative to daily IF – some people find it easier to have one or two very low-calorie days than maintain a daily window. For example, perhaps Tuesdays (after your Monday easy run) could be a low-cal 500-600 calorie day to nudge fat loss while fully resting from exercise. But again, **do not attempt low-cal days before or on your hard run days**, or you'll risk poor performance and recovery <sup>36</sup>.

As your goal weight nears, **shift your mindset** from pure weight loss to **weight maintenance and fueling**. You want to arrive at marathon training in July with your body well-nourished and strong. It's okay if by June you decide to eat *at maintenance calories* for a few weeks to stabilize – this can actually help reset hormones and prevent your metabolism from dropping due to prolonged deficit. Remember, the ultimate goal is a successful marathon finish under 6 hours, *not* a specific number on the scale. Given your training, your body composition will have improved (more muscle, less fat) even if the scale number is higher than some "ideal." Focus on **performance metrics** too: e.g., you might find you can now run 5 miles nonstop, or do 10 pushups, etc., that you couldn't before – these functional improvements matter greatly.

- **Strength Training:** Through Phase 3, continue strength workouts **at least 1x per week, ideally 2x if you can manage**. As mileage climbs, it's common to reduce strength frequency a bit to save energy, but don't drop it entirely. In fact, one solid strength session each week can **maintain your muscular strength** and even continue making gains, according to training experts <sup>37</sup>. Many studies show that runners who do regular resistance training perform better and have more endurance than those who don't <sup>37</sup>. That said, you might switch to a **maintenance mode**: one day a week could be



a full-body lift (covering all major muscle groups in 45 minutes), and on another day you could do a short core and mobility routine. For example, **Thursday** could be your main lifting day (since Friday is rest, you have time to recover before the weekend long run). Keep the intensity moderate – *do not go to failure*. The goal is to stay strong but **avoid excess fatigue or soreness** that could interfere with running <sup>38</sup>. If certain exercises cause soreness, dial them back. Prioritize *posterior chain* (glutes/hamstrings/back) and core, which are crucial for maintaining good running form as you fatigue in long runs. Also incorporate some **mobility and flexibility work** now (like dynamic stretches, foam rolling, or yoga) – limber muscles will help you handle the increasing distances.

If you have any muscle weaknesses or niggles, now is a good time to address them. For example, many runners benefit from exercises like *clamshells* or *monster walks with a resistance band* to strengthen hip stabilizers (preventing knee pain), or *ankle/calf exercises* to avoid Achilles or foot issues. Use this phase to **“prehab”** – strengthening areas that commonly get injured in marathon training (hips, calves, core) so you reduce injury risk later <sup>14</sup>. You can consult a trainer or PT for a quick evaluation/recommendation if possible.

- **Mindset & Motivation:** With the marathon drawing nearer, it's normal to feel excited but also daunted by the training ahead. Phase 3 is a great time to **remind yourself how far you've come**: from 10 miles a week to 25+, from struggling at 15 min/mile to now much faster, from 290 lbs to a dramatically lighter weight. That's incredible progress in 6–8 months. Use that as fuel – you are *not* the same person who took 6h50m to finish a marathon in 2024; you're much fitter now and still improving. Embrace the identity of an athlete. Consider joining some group runs or a running club for your long runs if you haven't – the social support can really help in those 2-3 hour runs. As the weather warms, try to enjoy some **scenic trail runs or new routes** for variety (Phase 3 is a good time for a change of scenery before the strict marathon plan kicks in). Keep things fun to avoid burnout: do some runs without looking at pace – maybe a “run for fun” 5-miler where you just enjoy the movement. Also, continue using **non-food rewards**. Perhaps plan something for the end of June, like a weekend trip or a celebratory event, to mark the end of your base training and the start of marathon training. This provides a mental refresh.

By the end of June 2026, you should have a robust running base, a much leaner body, and confidence from having done at least 16-18 miles in a single run. You're now ready to tackle the dedicated marathon training in the final phase, where the focus shifts from weight loss to peaking for race day performance.

## Phase 4: Marathon-Specific Training (Jul – Oct 2026)

**Focus:** This is it – the final 16 weeks (approximately) leading up to the NYC Marathon. In this phase, your training becomes *marathon-focused*: long runs are the cornerstone, weekly mileage peaks, and you'll practice race pacing, fueling, and everything needed for marathon day. The goal here is not to lose a ton of weight (in fact, it's okay if weight loss slows or stops here), but to **convert your improved fitness into marathon-ready endurance and speed**. We will still keep an eye on nutrition (sticking to healthy eating, perhaps with a bit more carbs timed to runs), and we'll taper down in the last few weeks to arrive at the start line fresh. The key is to follow a structured plan closely (to which you've already built up), while **listening to your body to avoid overtraining**. By now, you trust the process – stick with it and you'll succeed.

- **Goals:** Complete a **16-week marathon training plan** that brings you to the start line healthy and confident. Hit a peak long run of **20 miles** (possibly 2 runs at 18-20 miles) about 3-4 weeks before

race day <sup>39</sup> <sup>40</sup> . Achieve a peak weekly mileage in the ballpark of **35–40 miles** (depending on how your body handles volume; it could be less if you incorporate cross-training, which is okay). Another goal is to practice and lock in a **marathon race strategy**: determine a sustainable run/walk pattern or continuous pace that will get you under 6 hours. For example, you might decide on something like **5:1 run/walk intervals** (run 5 minutes, walk 1 minute, continuously) which many find effective for long races – we'll refine this based on your long run experiences. *If* weight loss is still desired, a secondary goal could be to lose a bit more (perhaps another 5-10 lbs over these 4 months), but **only if it happens naturally** from training and healthy eating – do not enforce a strict calorie deficit at the expense of training quality now <sup>41</sup> . Finally, a crucial goal: avoid injury and arrive at the marathon start well-rested (this means respecting rest days and tapering despite the temptation to over-train).

- **Training Plan Structure:** We will effectively follow a **Marathon Novice/Intermediate Training Plan** structure (similar to Hal Higdon Novice programs) adapted to your schedule <sup>42</sup> . This entails 4 runs per week: three shorter runs (including one mid-week semi-long run or workout) and one long run each weekend, plus 1 day of cross-training, and 2 rest days <sup>39</sup> . You have already been doing something close to this, so it won't be a big shock to the system. One possible schedule: **Tue – Mid-week run, Wed – Medium run or workout, Thu – Easy run, Sat – Long run**, with Mon/Fri rest, and perhaps Sun as cross-training (or complete rest depending on fatigue). Adjust to the days that work for you, but keep the pattern of not running more than 2–3 days in a row to allow recovery.
- **Mileage Progression:** At the start of July, your long run might already be ~16 miles from Phase 3. In early training, you could actually cut back a little to give yourself a mini-recovery, then build up again. For example, a typical long run progression for July–October could be: 14 (cutback/start), 16, 18, 12 (cutback), 18, 20, 14 (cutback), 20 (peak), 12, 8 (taper), Marathon. This is just an example; many plans only have one 20-miler, some have two. You should definitely do **at least one 18–20 mile run** about 3–4 weeks out from race <sup>43</sup> (e.g. early October) to be confident. However, **don't overdo the long runs** – going beyond 20 miles in training isn't usually necessary for beginners and can be risky for injury. During this phase, you *might* find you no longer need walk breaks on some long runs due to improved fitness, but **continue to employ walk breaks proactively** if they help you go the distance. In fact, the Galloway run-walk method often allows faster recovery and strong finishes; you might use a formula like run 1 mile, walk 1 minute during long runs, or whatever interval feels right (some runners do run 10 minutes, walk 1, etc.). Use your longest training runs to **finalize your race pacing plan**. For example, if in your 18-miler you maintained ~13:30 min/mile with a certain run/walk schedule and felt good, that's a promising sign for holding that in the marathon.
- **Mid-week “Medium Long” Run:** Marathon plans typically include a mid-week run that is somewhat longer (e.g. 6–10 miles) to build additional endurance. For you, Wednesday might be the best day for this given you have ~1 hour available – you may extend that to ~1.5 hours occasionally. Example: start with 6 miles on Wed, build up to 8–10 miles by September for that mid-week run (perhaps splitting between before work and after if needed, or doing part on a treadmill if time at once is an issue). These medium-long runs at an easy pace will complement your weekend long runs. If 8–10 miles mid-week is not feasible time-wise, do what you can (5–6 miles still helps). The idea is to get used to running on somewhat tired legs, simulating the later miles of the marathon.
- **Speed/Tempo Workouts:** In Phase 4, the priority is endurance, but doing *some* faster running maintains your efficiency. If you can handle it, include a **weekly tempo run or intervals** up until

about 4-6 weeks before the race, then shift focus to purely marathon-pace or easier runs. For example, in July/August you might do a tempo run of 4-5 miles at a steady moderately-hard pace (maybe around your 10K pace or a bit slower). Or intervals like 800m or 1-mile repeats at a strong pace with rest between. However, **always balance intensity with recovery** – if you feel overly fatigued, it's better to skip speed work than to sacrifice the long run. Another beneficial workout is the **race-pace run**: e.g. run 6-8 miles at your goal marathon pace (which for sub-6 might be ~13:30/mile). This helps you lock in the feeling and confidence at that pace. You could incorporate race-pace segments into your mid-week medium run or even during long runs (e.g. the last 5 miles of a 15-miler at goal pace). Such workouts are tough but great mental prep. Given your low-carb regimen, remember to **take some carbs before/during these harder efforts** – by now you likely know how a bit of carb can boost your higher-intensity performance without derailing your diet <sup>24</sup> .

- **Tapering:** The last **2-3 weeks before Nov 1** form your taper. At this time, you'll **reduce your mileage** significantly to allow full recovery and glycogen replenishment before the race <sup>44</sup> <sup>45</sup> . If your peak week (with the 20-miler) is 3 weeks out, then two weeks out you might cut total mileage by ~30-40%, and the final week by ~60%. For example, if you peaked at 40 miles, then do ~25 miles two weeks out, and ~15 miles (plus the marathon) in the final week. Your longest run two weeks out might be ~12 miles, and one week out maybe ~8 miles at most – and all of it *very easy*. Taper is often mentally challenging because you'll feel like you should be doing more, but trust it. It's a crucial phase where your body repairs micro-damage and comes to the start line with fresh legs. *Phantom aches and anxiety are common in taper – don't worry, it's normal!* Stick to the plan and resist the urge to squeeze in extra miles. Use the extra time to double-check race logistics, do gentle stretching, and visualize success.

- **Nutrition & Fueling in Marathon Phase:** At this stage, **performance and recovery take precedence over aggressive dieting**. Continue eating **whole, nutrient-dense foods** with an emphasis on proteins, healthy fats, and controlled carbs. Since you prefer low-carb, maintain that for your regular meals, but **allow yourself more carbs strategically around long runs and intense workouts**, as you've been practicing. By now, you are likely quite fat-adapted, which is an advantage for marathon endurance – your body can burn fat for fuel efficiently. However, even the most fat-adapted athletes benefit from some carbs during a **race as long as a marathon** <sup>11</sup> <sup>46</sup> . So, practice a fueling strategy: for example, you might plan to consume ~30 grams of carb per hour during the marathon (which is lower than the typical 50-60g many high-carb athletes take, but might be enough given your adaptation). This could be in the form of sports drink, gels, or even real foods like dried fruit – whatever sits well in your stomach from your trial runs. **Practice this on every long run:** know exactly what you will use on race day. If low-carb gels or drinks aren't giving you energy, don't be afraid to use mainstream gels (like 20-25g sugar each) during the race – because during intense exercise, your body will burn it directly. The important thing is to **avoid a blood sugar crash**, so once you start fueling in the race (typically after ~45-60 min), take something regularly (every 30-45 min). In training, you can experiment by maybe doing one long run with minimal fuel (to train fat usage), and another long run with more fuel to compare how you feel – but *never do your longest runs with zero fuel*, we want to practice taking in fuel to train your gut.

On the hydration front, summer training means sweating: **stay on top of electrolytes** (sodium, potassium, magnesium). You can continue to use electrolyte tablets or drinks (like Nuun, or a homemade mix) during long runs. A good practice is to drink to thirst and ensure your urine isn't too dark – dehydration can wreck performance. As you get close to race, consider a slight **carbo-load** if appropriate: because you're low-carb

normally, even a moderate increase in carbs in the last 2-3 days before the marathon can super-fill your glycogen stores <sup>26</sup> . For example, three days out, you might raise your carb intake to ~150-200g per day (with clean carbs like oats, rice, potatoes, fruit) – that’s still not a huge carb load by conventional standards, but it might be plenty for you. The night before the marathon, have a balanced dinner with carbs, protein, and not too much fat or fiber (to avoid GI issues) – perhaps something like grilled chicken, rice or pasta (if you allow it then), and some veggies. **Don’t stuff yourself extremely full**; just top off your energy. And remember to **not try any new foods** that week that you haven’t had in training <sup>47</sup> .

- **Strength Training & Cross-Training:** In marathon season, **scale strength training down to maintenance**. One session a week of light to moderate strength (20-30 minutes) is sufficient <sup>37</sup> . Its purpose is to keep your muscles engaged and strong, but not to make you sore or sap energy. Focus on core, mobility, and maybe some leg maintenance (like a few bodyweight squats or lunges, nothing heavy). As the weeks progress, you might drop formal strength altogether by the last 3-4 weeks to free up recovery capacity – and that’s fine. You won’t gain any new muscle now, but you can maintain the robustness you built. *In short: keep doing just enough strength so you feel stable and supported, but prioritize being fresh for your runs.* If you enjoy yoga or stretching classes, those can be great in this phase for flexibility and relaxation on rest days. Cross-training (cycling, swimming) can be used sparingly if you want a break from running, but generally you will be running enough that additional cardio isn’t needed beyond short active recovery sessions.

- **Mental Preparation and Motivation:** This final training phase can be the toughest, but also the most rewarding. You will have some very tired days – it’s normal when peaking mileage. **Keep your motivation high by reflecting on your progress and your purpose.** Think about why finishing this marathon under 6 hours matters to you. Perhaps it’s to prove to yourself how far you’ve come, to inspire others, or to reclaim your health. During really long runs, practice positive self-talk and mental strategies. For example, break the run into sections (“just get to the next mile marker... good, now the next one”) or have a mantra (“one step at a time” or “I am strong, I’ve got this”) to repeat when it gets hard. Visualize running through the streets of NYC, crossing that finish line with **5**: something on the clock.

Also, now is a good time to **fine-tune the practical details**: your marathon shoes (ensure you have a well-fitting pair with maybe <300 miles on them by race day), your clothing (nothing that chafes – test it on long runs), and your race morning routine (what to eat, when to arrive, etc.). Maybe do a dress-rehearsal long run where you mimic race morning: get up early, eat what you plan to eat, wear the gear you’ll wear, and run, say, 15 miles at roughly the same time of day as the marathon. Little things like this can reduce pre-race jitters.

- **Avoiding Burnout:** While you are training hard, be alert to signs of overtraining: excessive fatigue that doesn’t improve after rest, persistent muscle soreness, trouble sleeping, or a drop in performance. If you suspect you’re a bit overcooked, don’t hesitate to add an extra rest day or replace a run with a gentle bike session. It’s better to be 10% under-trained than 1% over-trained on race day, as the saying goes. Keep up with recovery routines (stretching, foam rolling, using a massage gun or getting a massage, etc.). If something hurts (like a sharp pain in knee or foot), address it immediately: take a few days off if needed, ice it, and if it persists, see a physio. It’s much better to miss a couple training runs now than to be injured for the marathon. Given you have had no injuries so far, let’s keep that streak by being smart now.

- **Taper & Race Week:** As mentioned, taper time is about rejuvenation. In the final week (late Oct 2026), stick to your normal diet or even slightly increase carbs, and **do not do any fasting** this week – you want to be fully fueled and hydrated. Your runs will be very short and just enough to keep your legs loose (e.g. two 3-mile easy runs with a few short strides to stay sharp). Use the extra time to double-check travel plans (if any), expo visit for bib pickup, and your race gear checklist. Get good sleep especially in the week leading up (the night before the race you might be anxious and not sleep great, that's okay – the nights before that matter more for rest).

**Race Day (Nov 1, 2026):** Wake up early enough to have a light breakfast (whatever you've determined works for you – could be a small low-GI carb plus protein, like oatmeal with nuts, or eggs and a piece of toast, etc.). Given your intermittent fasting background, eating early might feel odd; *do practice this in training*. Aim to consume something ~2-3 hours before the race start so it's digested – you don't want to start the marathon depleted. Keep sipping water or a sports drink as you wait for the start, especially if there's a long wait (NYC Marathon often has long staging times).

**Pacing Strategy:** For a sub-6 hour goal, target pace is about **13:40 per mile** (which gives ~5:59 finish). However, in a big marathon like NYC with crowds and bridges, your pace might fluctuate. A great approach is to stick to a comfortable effort for the first half, even if that means being a bit slower than 13:40 for some miles, and then see if you can maintain or slightly negative-split. The key is **don't start too fast** – the excitement makes it easy to go out at 12:00 pace which could burn you out. You might plan to go through the half marathon point around 2:55–3:00 (which is ~13:30–13:45 pace) and leave some energy for the second half. Use the run/walk method if that's your plan – for example, run 0.9 mile, walk 0.1 each mile (this breaks the race into manageable chunks and gives you a scheduled walk break to look forward to). Many runners in the 5-6 hour range use run/walk and often *beat* those who try to run continuously but slow down later. During the race, **fuel regularly** – maybe start taking a gel around mile 4-5 (30-45 min in) and keep a schedule (like a gel every 45 min, or at miles 5, 9, 13, 17, 21 for example). If you carry a sports drink or if it's provided, use that too, especially to get electrolytes (you might lose a lot of salt over 6 hours, consider taking salt capsules or a sports drink with sodium). By now, your gut should handle what you practiced – stick to known brands/flavors that you've used.

Mentally, break the marathon into sections: NYC course has distinct parts (Staten Island start, Brooklyn excitement for miles, Queens bridge, Manhattan, Bronx, then final Manhattan stretch). Maybe dedicate each borough or each 5-mile section to someone or something (some runners find motivation in this: e.g., miles 1-5 think about your personal journey, 6-10 think about supportive family/friends, etc.). When it inevitably gets tough around miles 18-22, remember **your training** – you've done 20 miles in training, you know what that feels like. You are prepared. Remind yourself how you overcame hard runs. *One foot in front of the other*, as you've been doing for months.

**Finish strong:** The last 2-3 miles will be a mental game. This is where your weight loss and strength training will pay off – carrying significantly less weight and having stronger muscles will make a big difference in fatigue resistance. Keep pushing, use the incredible NYC crowd energy, and keep your eyes on the finish. Visualize that clock showing 5:something as you cross – it's going to feel amazing. And no matter what, **do not give up** – even if something goes awry (cramps, etc.), you can always employ a brisk power-walk strategy to keep on pace. A 14:00 min/mile walk is possible if needed; just keep moving forward.

- **Post-Race:** When you cross that finish line, take a moment to acknowledge this huge accomplishment. You will have not only finished a marathon (an achievement in itself) but also

improved drastically from your 2024 attempt – likely slicing close to an hour off your time. That reflects an enormous change in fitness and health. Be proud! Ensure to refuel with some carbs and protein soon after finishing (the race will provide some snacks – have what appeals to you, you earned it!). And in the days after, *recover properly* – plenty of fluids, electrolytes, gentle stretching, and rest. You'll likely be sore for a few days (marathons do that), so take it easy. But do take satisfaction in how far you've come.

## Conclusion and Final Thoughts

Over this year-long journey, you will have progressed through a well-rounded program of **fasting & nutrition, gradual running build-up, strength training, and smart recovery**. By focusing on weight loss early and base training, you set yourself up to train for the marathon effectively without carrying unnecessary weight <sup>9</sup>. Each phase had clear incremental goals to keep you motivated – from losing your first 20 lbs, to finishing a half marathon in spring, to nailing your first 18-miler in training. This keeps your **motivation high and mindset positive** throughout. Remember that consistency and patience are your best friends; avoid the trap of doing too much too soon. We've incorporated fasting and low-carb principles in a periodized way – heavier fasting when training load was light, and fueling more when training load is heavy – to get the benefits of both fat loss and training performance. This balance is crucial <sup>16 41</sup>.

As you follow this plan, **listen to your body** and adjust if needed. The plan is a blueprint – if you're feeling great and want to add an extra mile, or feeling exhausted and need an extra rest day, that's okay. The body's response is the ultimate guide. However, do stick as closely as possible to the progression, because it's designed to minimize injury risk while maximizing improvement. The combination of aerobic base, speed development, and long-run endurance will have you well-prepared. And the inclusion of strength training will mean you're a more efficient, stronger runner than you were in 2024 <sup>12 37</sup>.

Finally, maintain your **support system** – whether it's friends, family, or online communities. Share your journey; it can help to have accountability and encouragement (maybe start a training log or blog about your progress). And periodically remind yourself of your **"why"**: better health, a faster marathon, setting an example, personal pride – whatever drives you. By Nov 2026, you won't have to *imagine* a different you; you'll be living it. You will have earned that finisher medal with months of hard work, discipline, and smart training.

Stay focused, trust the process, and enjoy the journey. **You've got this!** Now let's execute the plan, one phase at a time, all the way to that sub-6 marathon finish line.

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