

Predict Your Race Pace: Benchmark Workouts for the 5K, 10K, Half Marathon, and Marathon

By Laura Norris | This Runner's Recipes

How bad do you want it?

Before you can answer that, let me ask you this:
what exactly is it that you want?

After completing your first race in any distance, most runners shift their focus from just wanting to finish a race to wanting to run a certain goal time.

Setting time goals is important for motivating you to train and for inspiring you to dig deeper and push harder during those tough moments of racing. However, setting the wrong time goal can set you up for a bad race, possible burnout, and disappointment.

So how do you set the right time goal?

The right time goal for a race, whether it's a full marathon or a 5K, is simultaneously challenging yet realistic. It's out of reach enough that you have to work for it and risk not achieving it, but it's not so unachievable that it discourages you.

Benchmark workouts will help you set a time goal for your race, since these workouts serve as true indicators of your race-specific fitness.

Do them one to two times throughout your training, with at least a month of race training completed before your first one but no sooner than 3-4 weeks before your race.

All you need? A reliable GPS watch or a stopwatch and a route with distances marked.

Unless otherwise stated, perform these workouts on as similar terrain to race day as possible.

Avoid doing these workouts on the treadmill, since the treadmill sets the pace for you.

Do not taper for these workouts. Include them as part of your normal weekly training schedule with no additional rest days before or after.



5K Benchmark Workout

5 x 1K at goal 5K pace

The workout:

Warm up with 1-2 miles of easy running,
followed by strides and drills.

Run 5 repeats of 1 km (0.62) at goal 5K race pace and recover
with 200 m of easy running.

Cool down with 1-2 miles of easy running.

Your average pace for the 5 x 1 km repeats will be
your goal race pace,
as long as you did not slow down by more than
10 seconds per mile in the later repeats.

This workout is best done on a track, so you can accurately record
your splits and run the exact distance for each repeat.



10K Benchmark Workout

3 x 2 miles at goal 10K pace

The workout:

Warm up with 1-2 miles of easy running followed by strides and drills.

Run 3 repeats of 2 miles at your goal 10K pace with $\frac{1}{2}$ mile of easy running between each repeat.

Cool down for 1-2 miles.

Record your splits of each mile of the 2 mile repeats.

If you were able to consistently pace your each of your repeats, then your average pace from the 2 mile repeats is your goal 10K race pace.



Half Marathon Benchmark Workout

6 miles at half marathon race effort

The workout:

Warm up with 2 miles of easy running,
followed by dynamic stretches.

Run for 6 miles, without stopping, at half marathon effort.
This should be a comfortably hard pace, near tempo effort.

To gauge your effort, listen to your breathing:
steadily breathe in for two counts and out for two.

Cool down with 1 mile of easy running.

After the workout, note your splits.

If your mile splits were always within 10 seconds per mile,
average the splits to find your goal half marathon pace.



Marathon Benchmark Workout

12-14 miles at marathon race effort

The workout:

Warm up with 2 miles of easy running,
followed by dynamic stretches.

Run 12-14 miles at marathon effort.

Your breathing should be slightly labored but not hard,
and the pace should feel moderate and sustainable.

Cool down with 1-2 miles of easy running.

If you sustained a consistent pace for this workout
and didn't struggle to finish,
then you can use your average pace from the 12-14 miles
as your goal marathon pace.