

Learn Pace to Save Your Race.

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If you've trained for, then tapered for a big race, you're going to be ready and rested. You should have done a number of short, fast intervals in the days before the race to keep your legs enzymatically "alive," and finally you should have a certain amount of adrenaline coursing through your veins as the starter's gun goes off. The result: unless you really control yourself, you're going to start out too fast. 90% of your competitors will also start off too fast which is additional motivation to push too hard. DON'T!

The way to get around this is to consciously start out about 10% slower than what you judge your race pace to be. Factoring in everything, you'll probably be right on pace anyway, but assuming you've started a bit slower than average pace, the physiological effect is that the first half of the race will seem very easy, then it'll get gradually more difficult as you accelerate through the race. Studies have found that most world records in the 5K - marathon were set by athletes whose second half of the race was a few percent faster than the first half. It works!

The physiological benefits are certainly part of the equation, but it can also be a huge psychological boost to spend the last few kms of the race flying by dozens of burned out stragglers who started out too fast.

Practice is the only way to learn pace. Once it's in there you should be able to "hear" how fast you're going by listening to your cadence. You develop a sort of metronome in your head after a while where you know exactly what a certain pace sound like. I can usually "hear" the difference between two paces down to within a few seconds per kilometer within my normal range of 4:00 - 6:00 per km. I'm terrible at estimating paces any slower than that. Why? I haven't practiced walking any slower than about 5:45 per km. I'm sure I would be able to guess paces at 6:00 to 8:00 per km just as well as the faster paces if I practiced it; you learn to do by doing.

Since stride length remains fairly constant through a wide range of paces, turnover rate is the major factor affecting walking speed. If you learn the "sounds" of your various paces by keeping track of splits on marked courses, then listen for the right sound during races, you will be on the right pace.

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