

TC COACHING · MARATHON

MAKE YOUR MARATHON OFF-SEASON COUNT

12 weeks of foundation before your race build. **Testing, routine, strength, recovery,** and what to do when life gets in the way.

BY TOM COLLINS · TC COACHING

PERFORMANCE · LONGEVITY · IDENTITY · IMPACT

INSIDE

WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE

01	WHY THE OFF-SEASON MATTERS	03
02	WHAT THE OFF-SEASON IS FOR	06
03	START WITH TESTING	08
04	LOOK BACK BEFORE YOU PLAN	15
05	BUILDING THE ROUTINE	17
06	THE TRAINING WEEK	21
07	STRENGTH AND PLYOMETRICS	25
08	RECOVERY	29
09	NUTRITION AND BODY COMPOSITION	34
10	WHEN THE ROUTINE GETS KNOCKED	35
11	THE OFF-SEASON CURVEBALLS	39
12	THE OFF-SEASON MISTAKES I SEE MOST	40
13	WHAT 12 WEEKS LOOKS LIKE	42
14	FINISHING THE OFF-SEASON	45
15	NEXT STEP	47
A	APPENDIX: WORKSHEETS, RPE, TOOLS, GLOSSARY	48

Read it once, then keep it open.



CHAPTER 01

WHY THE OFF-SEASON MATTERS

THE SHORT VERSION

The race feels ages away. That's exactly why the off-season is where your season gets won or lost.

So, firstly... I get it. Your last race is behind you, the next one is months away, and a missed session doesn't seem to matter much. One week here, a skipped run there. It all feels a long way from race day.

That's the trap. Because the races feel so far off, it's easy to treat this part of the year as time that doesn't count. It counts more than any other.

The whole season is set up in the off-season. The routine you build now, the strength you put on, the habits you practise and the gaps you close are what you carry into race season. You can't build them once the race build starts and the long runs start stacking up.

THE MISTAKE I SEE MOST

"The race is ages away, so missing training won't matter."

The fix: treat these 12 weeks as the start of the season, not a gap before it. A missed week now is a week you don't get back.

PREPARATION WORK, NOT NUGATORY WORK

The work you do over the next 12 weeks is the foundation everything else stands on. So take it as seriously as you take race season. Not with more panic, not with more volume. Just as seriously.

And this is about more than the race. **Performance is the vehicle, lifestyle transformation is the outcome.** The routine, the strength and the habits you build now are what make you the athlete, and the person, you want to be next summer.

TWELVE WEEKS, WHENEVER THEY FIT

The 12 weeks are a foundation block that comes before your race build. They don't have to start the week your last marathon ends. Start them whenever you have 12 weeks before your marathon build begins.

A December start finishes around late February or early March, which suits marathons from roughly June onwards, and sets you up perfectly for an autumn marathon like Berlin, Chicago or Amsterdam. Racing a spring marathon? There isn't room for a full 12 weeks and a proper race build before it, so look at 1:1 coaching or a race build instead: tccoaching.co.uk/apply.

TIM

Tim wasn't interested in running when we started. His first 10K took him over an hour. In his first season he ran under 40 minutes for 10K. In his second, a 1:28 half marathon. In May 2026 he ran 3:08 in Copenhagen, and on 28 February 2027 he's going for sub-3 in Malta. That's what consistency does over seasons.

> If nothing changes, nothing changes.

WHAT THIS GUIDE COVERS

- Testing, and what your numbers mean
- Reviewing last season honestly
- Building a routine that works at home
- Shaping the training week
- Strength and plyometrics
- Recovery: sleep, water, steps, stress
- Nutrition and body composition
- What to do when the routine gets knocked
- Finishing the off-season ready

HOW TO USE IT

This guide gives you the knowledge. It doesn't hold anything back. Four pieces work together:

THIS GUIDE — FREE

The whole off-season: the thinking, the rules, the habits and the testing.

TOM'S FREE TOOLS — FREE

The numbers: your zones, your week and your recovery habits, done for you at tccoaching.co.uk/tools.

THE PLAN — $97 (ABOUT £72) · 12 WEEKS

The TC Coaching Marathon Off-Season Plan. The actual sessions, week by week, in TrainingPeaks, with education videos from my Legacy Playbook.

1:1 COACHING — ALWAYS AVAILABLE

A specific, individual guide through your off-season and into race season.

THE OFF-SEASON WHATSAPP GROUP — FREE TO JOIN

One group for everyone working through an off-season with me. Ask questions of the group, or of me. Join at https://chat.whatsapp.com/G7PRpE7ed7RC2RQECdLRKc

FIRST MARATHON? This guide is written for runners who've done a marathon and want to go faster. If next year is your first, you're welcome too. Look out for these notes. Where the advice changes for you, I'll tell you how.

CHAPTER 02

WHAT THE OFF-SEASON IS FOR

THE SHORT VERSION

Seven jobs. The first one matters most.

The off-season has a lot to do, and it's tempting to treat every job as equal. They're not. Here they are in order, and in order of weight.

1

THE PRIME OUTCOME

BUILD THE ROUTINE AND CONSISTENCY

Everything else in this guide depends on it. A routine you can repeat week after week is worth more than any single session. Get this right and the other six jobs get done almost by default.

2

TEST, AND FIND YOUR LIMITER

A big outcome of the early off-season. Week 1 tells you where you are. Your results, read alongside your last season, tell you what exactly is holding you back, like speed, or holding pace late on, and so where the work goes (Chapters 3 and 4).

3

BUILD STRENGTH

The niggles I see most in runners are knees, Achilles and calves, and they usually come down to a lack of strength and durability as training steps up. Strength is there to protect the body and make sure that we maintain a higher level of availability for training throughout the entire season (Chapter 7).

4 **BUILD RECOVERY HABITS**

Sleep, water and routine, practised now, so by race season they're ingrained behaviours rather than new things to remember when life is already busy (Chapter 8).

5 **BUILD THE AEROBIC BASE, WITH INTENSITY IN IT**

About 80% of your running easy and 20% hard. For the marathon, that's one threshold session a week, with everything else easy enough to recover from (Chapter 6).

6 **LAY THE FOUNDATIONS FOR RACE PACE, WITHOUT CHASING IT**

Your body becomes efficient at the paces you train at, but the off-season doesn't mean endless miles at marathon pace. High-intensity efforts, strength and some threshold work build the durability to hold race pace for longer when the race build comes.

7 **BODY COMPOSITION, IF IT'S A GOAL**

The off-season can be a good time to focus on it, with a light touch. It's optional, and it never comes at the cost of jobs 1 to 4 (Chapter 9).

WHY ROUTINE COMES FIRST

Testing, strength, recovery and fitness all need you to turn up, week after week, for 12 weeks. That only happens when training has a fixed place in your life, rather than a fight for a gap every day.

Structure creates freedom. Once the routine is set, you stop spending energy deciding whether, when and what to train. You just go and do it.

MAKE IT YOURS

Jobs 1 to 4 are for everyone. Jobs 5 to 7 shift with you. Once you've tested (Chapter 3) and looked back at last season (Chapter 4), rank them for yourself. If you raced well but carried niggles all summer, job 3 moves up. If you faded in the last few miles, job 6 does.



CHAPTER 03

START WITH TESTING

THE SHORT VERSION

Test once, in Week 1, then train. Only add a test if hard sessions start to feel much, much easier, to reset your zones. What you do with the numbers is the coaching.

WHY TEST AT ALL

Testing sets a baseline. That baseline sets your training zones. And your zones mean the work that follows is done with intent, rather than guesswork.

Without them, an easy run drifts into a steady one, a threshold set becomes a race, and you spend 12 weeks training hard in the middle without really knowing why.

So you test once at the start, properly: a run threshold test and a strength assessment in the gym. Then you train. That's your test for this off-season. The next full test comes next off-season.

TEST ONCE, THEN TRAIN

One test, in Week 1. Everything after it is training.



WHY NOT MORE OFTEN?

1. **Testing done properly takes a huge toll on the body.** Test too often and you'll miss training because of it, which is the very thing that makes you fitter.
2. **It builds the wrong expectation.** I train, I test, I should see massive gains. Sometimes you won't, and that's hard to take. Trust the process. Don't max out all the time.
3. **Blocks have different jobs.** It's rare to progress in both your running and your strength in any single block. A test that shows no change makes you question whether you've progressed at all, and you miss the progress that has happened.
4. **Some progress doesn't show in a test.** Twelve weeks of aerobic base and strength work builds durability: the ability to hold pace for longer and go further. Threshold pace and strength numbers measure your maximum output, so you wouldn't expect them to jump.

So: test when you start, then once each off-season. In this guide, that's Week 1. That being said, there is one exception. If sessions that used to be hard start to feel much easier, your zones are probably out of date. That is the time to add a test and reset them.

THE MISTAKE I SEE MOST

Testing too often, and chasing the numbers.

The fix: one test each off-season. In between, judge progress by how sessions feel and how consistently you're turning up. Only add a test when hard sessions start to feel much easier.

THE PROTOCOLS

HOW TO TEST

Each test in full, so you can do it on your own. Tools on my website do the maths for you.

RUN THRESHOLD TEST

30-MINUTE TIME TRIAL

Warm-up drills first: leg swings, air squats, good mornings, lunges, bounces on your toes.

1. Warm up: 8 minutes at RPE 4.
2. Strides, five rounds: 20 seconds hard at RPE 9, then 40 seconds easy at RPE 4. Accelerate over the first 10 seconds, then hold the hard effort for the last 10.
3. Recover: 2 minutes at RPE 5.
4. **The test: 30 minutes at RPE 9,** the fastest pace you can hold evenly for the full 30.
5. Cool down: 5 minutes at RPE 3.

Your **average pace for the 30 minutes** is your threshold pace. Wearing a heart rate monitor? Your **average heart rate for the 30** is your threshold heart rate.

- Pick a flat, repeatable route with as few interruptions as possible, such as road crossings. Use the same route next time so the numbers compare.
- Do it alone, and let the first five minutes feel too easy. Going off hard, or chasing someone, is how people fall apart at 18 minutes.

↗ **Run Threshold Calculator** tccoaching.co.uk/tools/run-threshold

↗ **Pace & Speed** tccoaching.co.uk/tools/pace

MAKE THE TEST COUNT

- Test on fresh legs: an easy day, or a rest day, before it.
- Eat and drink as you would before a hard session, not a race.
- Write the numbers down straight away, in TrainingPeaks in the Post-Activity Notes, and on the My Test Results worksheet.
- Treadmill instead? Set it to 1% incline and use the same treadmill next time.

↗ **Heart Rate Zones** tccoaching.co.uk/tools/heart-rate-zones

↗ **RPE Explained** tccoaching.co.uk/tools/rpe

FOUNDATIONAL STRENGTH ASSESSMENT

IN A STANDARD GYM

An early read on where your strength work should go. Record every score as you go (in TrainingPeaks, in the Post-Activity Notes), with left and right written down separately.

WARM-UP

5 to 10 min bike or row, then 2 rounds:

W1. Air Squat × 10

W2. Bodyweight Reverse Lunge × 5 each side

W3. Band Pull-Apart × 10

W4. Glute Bridge, 2 sec hold × 10

W5. Bird Dog, 2 sec hold × 6 each side

W6. Side Plank, 20 sec each side

W7. Dead Bug × 8 each side

PLYOMETRICS

P1. Pogo Hops 3 × 6, easy and low

P2. Countermovement Jumps 2 × 5, submaximal, quiet landings

A. Trap Bar Deadlift: 3RM

Ramp sets: 8 easy, 6 moderate, then attempt a 3RM. Rest: 3 to 5 min between ramp sets and attempts

B. Single-Leg Leg Press: 3RM each leg

Ramp sets: 8 easy, 4 moderate, then 3RM each leg. Rest: 2 to 4 min between legs and attempts

C. Single-Leg Hamstring Curl: 3RM each leg

Ramp sets: 6 easy, 4 moderate, then 3RM each leg. Rest: 2 to 3 min between legs and attempts

D. Bench Press: 3RM

Ramp sets: 8 easy, 6 moderate, then attempt a 3RM. Rest: 3 to 5 min between ramp sets and attempts

E. Pull-Up: max quality reps

Strict, band-assisted or on the assisted machine. Record the assistance used and total reps. Full hang at the bottom, chin clearly over the bar, controlled lowering, no swinging or kipping. Rest: 2 to 3 min

F. Front Plank: max hold

Rest: 2 min, then a second attempt only if the first ended early for a reason other than fatigue

COACH NOTE

Treat this as a high-quality strength capacity test, not a grinder session. We want clean reps and reliable data. Keep transitions efficient, but don't rush the heavy attempts: take full recovery so the 3RM numbers mean something. Prioritise movement quality throughout, especially trunk stability and lower back position as you tire.

Your max is the heaviest weight moved for clean reps. The moment form breaks, that attempt doesn't count and the test on that lift is over. Test left and right separately and write every number down. The gap between sides matters as much as the numbers.

> This is a test of strength, not of bravery.

WEEK 1

LAYING OUT TEST WEEK

Two tests in one week only works if they're spaced so each one gets a fair go. The rules:

- At least one easy day between the run test and the strength test.
- Fresh legs for both: no hard running the day before either test.
- Everything else that week is easy, by feel.
- Until your results are in, train by feel, using RPE.

EXAMPLE ONE WAY TO LAY OUT TEST WEEK

Mon	[KEY] Run: 30-Minute Threshold Test
Tue	Easy day: walk, or rest
Wed	Run: Easy, by RPE
Thu	[KEY] Strength: Foundational Strength Assessment
Fri	Rest, or a walk
Sat	Run: Easy, by RPE
Sun	Run: Easy and a little longer, by RPE

[KEY] = this week's priority sessions. Every session has a job, but if life gets in the way, protect these first.

MAKE IT YOURS

Move the days around your week, as long as the rules hold. If the gym only fits on certain days, place the strength test first and build the run test around it. The Weekly Planner does this for you.

↗ **Weekly Planner** tccoaching.co.uk/tools/week-planner

↗ **RPE Explained** tccoaching.co.uk/tools/rpe

WHAT THE NUMBERS MEAN

YOUR ZONES

Your test results set your zones. Each zone has an RPE (effort out of 10), so you can train by feel when you don't have a device, or when the numbers and your body disagree.

RUN: % OF THRESHOLD SPEED

This is a percentage of your threshold **speed**, not pace. A higher percentage means faster. The Run Threshold Calculator turns it into paces for you.

ZONE	% THRESHOLD	RPE	FEEL
Z1	75 to 80%	1 to 3	Recovery
Z2	80 to 90%	3 to 4	Easy aerobic
Z3	90 to 95%	5 to 6	Tempo
Z4	95 to 100%	7	Threshold
Z5	Above 100%	8 to 10	VO2 max

HEART RATE: FROM YOUR THRESHOLD HEART RATE

If you wore a heart rate monitor for the test, your average heart rate for the 30 minutes is your threshold heart rate. Put it into the Heart Rate Zones tool and it gives you a bpm range for each zone.

EASY RUNS: HEART RATE AND RPE, NOT PACE

Easy and long runs are governed by heart rate and RPE. Pace is an output, not a target. An athlete who can see a pace target will chase it on a day the legs feel good, and the easy run stops being easy. Pace zones are for your structured sessions: threshold, tempo and intervals.

↗ **Run Threshold Calculator** tccoaching.co.uk/tools/run-threshold

↗ **Heart Rate Zones** tccoaching.co.uk/tools/heart-rate-zones

↗ **RPE Explained** tccoaching.co.uk/tools/rpe

READING YOUR RESULTS

WHAT EACH RESULT TELLS YOU

RUN: THRESHOLD AGAINST YOUR GOAL	Put your threshold pace into the Run Threshold Calculator, then compare it with the pace your goal marathon time needs. The bigger the gap, the more the run fitness itself is your limiter. A small gap points to durability: holding the pace for longer.
STRENGTH: LEFT AGAINST RIGHT	More than about a 10 to 15% difference between sides on the single-leg tests is worth flagging to a coach or rehab specialist.
STRENGTH: AGAINST YOUR BODY WEIGHT	Which areas are strong, and which need work. This shapes what your strength sessions focus on (Chapter 7).
BENCH, PULL-UP AND PLANK	These tell you whether some foundational upper body and core work needs to come first.

THE LINE BETWEEN THIS GUIDE AND COACHING

You now know how to test, and what your numbers say.

Turning them into your weeks, your sessions and your progression is what The TC Coaching Marathon Off-Season Plan and 1:1 coaching do.

MAKE IT YOURS

Write every number down on the My Test Results worksheet in the appendix, left and right separately, with your zones from the tools. You'll need them in Chapter 4, and to compare against next off-season.

CHAPTER 04

LOOK BACK BEFORE YOU PLAN

THE SHORT VERSION

Your last season is your brief for this off-season. Where you fell short tells you where the work goes.

Before you plan a single session, look back. Honestly. Not at the race photos and the medal, but at where you fell short.

Your test results from Chapter 3 tell you where you are now. Your last season tells you what that cost you on race day. Put the two together and you know where the off-season work goes.

THE HONEST LOOK BACK

WHERE DID THE RACE GO?

Which part of the race cost you most? The start, the middle miles, the hills, or the last few miles?

WHICH KIND OF FITNESS?

Top-end speed, holding threshold for longer, or going long and still having something left at the end?

NIGGLES?

What kept coming back? Knees, Achilles, calves, hips. When did they start, and what was happening in training at the time?

MISSED WEEKS, AND WHY?

Count them, and write down the reason for each. Work, family, illness, injury, or training too hard the week before.

Be specific. **“My race was bad”** doesn't help. **“I held pace to halfway, then fell apart”** does, because it points straight at a kind of fitness.

HOW IT SHAPES YOUR OFF-SEASON

A limiter isn't just your weakest area. It's what's weak within it, and that's where the work goes. These are starting points, not rules.

YOUR LIMITER	WHERE THE WORK GOES
Speed Can't hit the pace, even fresh	Threshold work, and short, fast efforts.
Durability Held pace, then faded	Strength, and a long run built steadily rather than in big jumps.
Aerobic base Heart rate high at easy effort	More genuinely easy running, by heart rate and RPE.
Hills and changes of pace Lost time on hills or surges	Hill repeats, and single-leg strength.
Niggles all season Knees, Achilles, calves	Three strength sessions a week. Durability and injury resistance become the off-season focus.
Time Life squeezed the week	Fewer, better sessions. Protect the **[KEY]** runs and strength, and judge the week by the floor (Chapter 5).

NAME YOUR LIMITER IN ONE SENTENCE

Put your test results next to your look back and finish this sentence. One limiter, not three. Not "my running", but "my durability, because I faded after halfway".

My limiter is ..... because .....

FIRST RACE?

No last race at this distance to look back on? Use your test results and your longest runs. Ask where it got hard: the speed, or lasting the distance. That's usually your limiter.

MAKE IT YOURS

Fill in the My Last Season worksheet in the appendix. Your limiter decides your session mix in Chapter 6, and how many strength sessions you do in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 05

BUILDING THE ROUTINE

THE SHORT VERSION

Structure creates freedom. A fixed routine is the gold standard, [KEY] sessions give it flex, and a good week is about good decisions as much as ticked boxes.

STRUCTURE CREATES FREEDOM

A routine removes the decision-making. You're not deciding every morning whether to train, when to train and what to do. It's already decided. You just go and do it.

That matters more than it sounds. Every decision is a chance to talk yourself out of it, and in the off-season, with the race months away, that's an easy conversation to lose.

BUILD IT IN THE WEEKLY PLANNER

The Weekly Planner on my website (tccoaching.co.uk/tools/week-planner) does the fiddly part for you. You enter:

- Your commitments: work, school runs, pickups, and which days each applies
- The sessions you want
- Your wake and bed times
- “Doors open” times: when the gym is open
- A buffer for travel and changing
- A recovery day and your preferred time of day
- Max sessions per day and the minimum gap between them

Then click **Build my week**. It places the hardest-to-fit sessions first (usually the gym, because opening hours are fixed), only puts outdoor sessions in daylight, and tells you plainly when a session won't fit and why. Routine mode gives you a repeatable template. Training Windows shows every gap in your week by length.

THE CONVERSATIONS AT HOME

Most of the people I coach are busy parents and professionals. A routine only works if the people around you, especially at home, understand it, and there's give and take.

- Share the family jobs, like school pickups and after-school clubs, across the week, so your training doesn't fall on one person's goodwill.
- Show them the plan. When they can see the week, it stops being “you disappearing to train” and becomes part of how the house runs.
- Agree what gives when something comes up, before it comes up.

> Have the conversation before the off-season starts, not halfway through the first bad week.

A FIXED ROUTINE, WITH FLEX

A fixed routine is the gold standard. Same sessions, same days, same times. But life needs some flexibility, and that's where [KEY] sessions come in.

[KEY] SESSIONS

The priority sessions of the week. Every session has a job, but if life gets in the way, protect these first.

- Most weeks carry 2 to 3 of them.
- If everything is key, nothing is.
- When the week starts to go out of shape, move things around to get the [KEY] sessions in, following the moving rules in Chapter 6.

EXAMPLE **HOW A [KEY] SESSION LOOKS IN A PLAN**

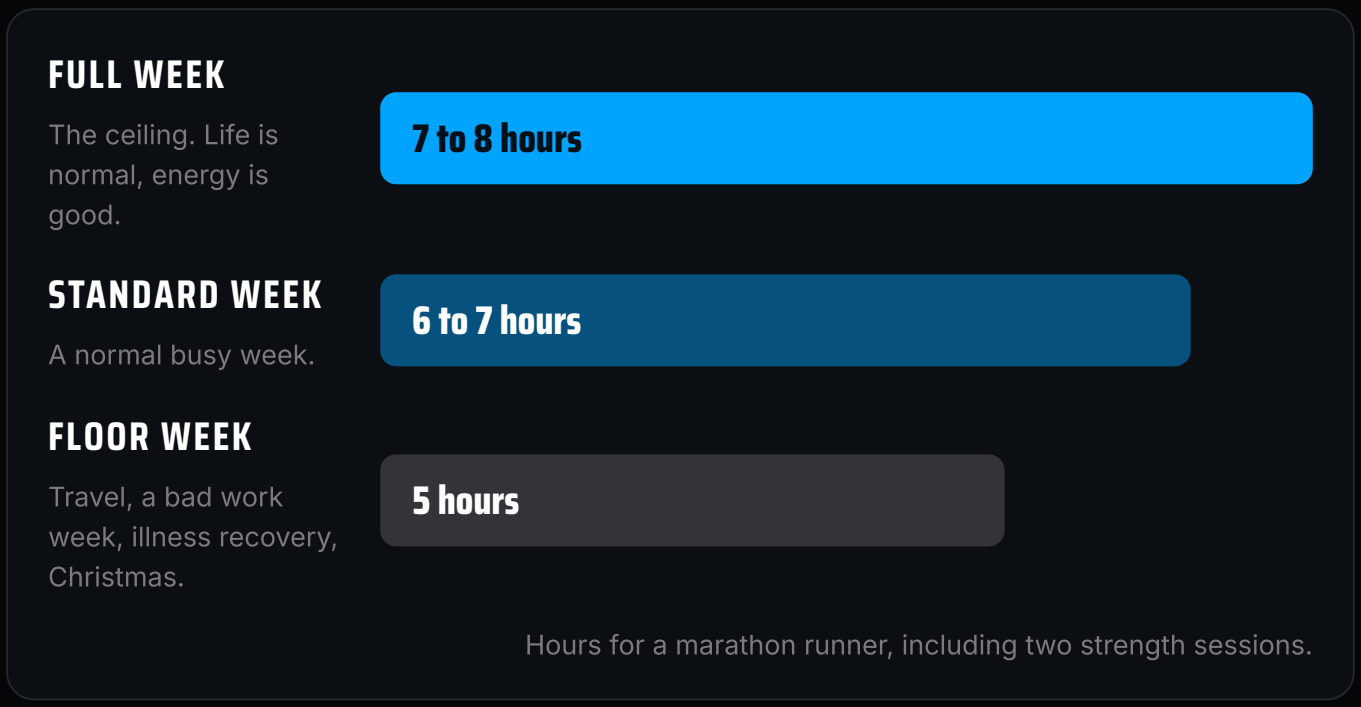
[KEY] Run: Threshold Intervals

Run: Easy Z2

SET YOUR FLOOR AND YOUR CEILING

THE THREE-TIER WEEK

Not every week looks the same, so don't plan as if it will. Build three versions of your week before the off-season starts.



THE RULES

1. Set your own floor and ceiling. The floor is never below 5 hours: five sessions of an hour, or seven of 45 minutes.
2. Every week should hit the floor. **A floor week is a successful week.**
3. Never more than two floor weeks in a row without a conversation about whether the plan fits your life.
4. Build all three in the Weekly Planner before the off-season starts, so on a bad week you're not planning from scratch.

> Plan for the life you have, then hold yourself to it.

MAKE IT YOURS

Write your three weeks on the My Three Weeks worksheet. The numbers are yours. The principle is the same: know your floor, and hit it.

WHAT A GOOD WEEK IS

A good week is all the training done, and good decisions made along the way. If that can't happen, it's a week where the [KEY] sessions were protected.

Good decisions count. Shortening a session instead of skipping it. Going to bed instead of watching one more episode. Moving the long run to Sunday when Saturday fell apart. A short session logged beats a perfect session missed.

RAMP IN

A note for beginners and anyone coming back, not a rule.

Going all in and trying to fit every session in, when you don't have the time, is shooting yourself in the foot. Start at around 60 to 70% of the work in the first week, and add a little each week, so by the end of the first month the full routine is in place.



Share of the full routine, weeks 1 to 4. Be OK that it takes a month to get into the swing of things.

THE MISTAKE I SEE MOST

Going all in, then burning out or falling off.

The fix: ramp in over the first month, and judge the week by the floor, not the ceiling.

THE WEEK ON A PAGE

Print the My Week on a Page tracker from the appendix, one for every week. Tick off your training and your habits. By Week 12 you have 12 pages of proof that you were consistent, which is exactly what you'll need in Chapter 14.

CHAPTER 06

THE TRAINING WEEK

THE SHORT VERSION

80/20. Easy genuinely easy, hard genuinely hard. The session mix set by your limiter, and an hour of proper strength twice a week.

80/20
EASY / HARD

INTENSITY: 80/20

A good rule of thumb: about 80% of your training easy, and 20% hard. Intensity starts from the first week after testing. For the marathon, that's one threshold session a week, plus strides, with the rest easy.

Nothing is off limits in the off-season. What you do depends on what would benefit you most, which is what Chapter 4 was for.

Progress the hard sessions by adding reps as well as lengthening them. Adding a rep is how the session grows without turning into a different session.

EASY GENUINELY EASY, HARD GENUINELY HARD

Easy runs go by heart rate and RPE, not pace. If an easy session creeps up into the middle, it's no longer easy, and it takes something away from the hard session that follows.

Threshold sessions aren't a max-out effort like VO2 max work. If they start to feel grey-zone easy, your threshold is improving, so push it a little. And if sessions that used to be hard now feel much easier, that's the time to retest and reset your zones (Chapter 3).

Be disciplined about keeping the recoveries between efforts genuinely easy. That's what teaches the body to clear lactate and recover while it's still moving.

↗ **Heart Rate Zones** tccoaching.co.uk/tools/heart-rate-zones

↗ **RPE Explained** tccoaching.co.uk/tools/rpe

THE MISTAKE I SEE MOST

Easy runs that aren't easy.

The fix: run easy by heart rate and RPE, not pace. If you can't hold a conversation, slow down. The easy runs are what let the hard runs be hard.

THE SESSION MIX

A rough order for a week:

4	1	1	2
RUNS	THRESHOLD	LONG RUN	STRENGTH

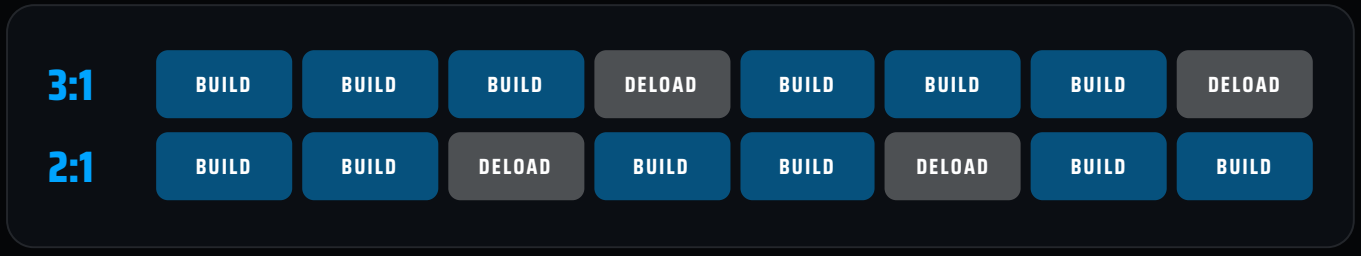
Adjust it by your limiter (Chapter 4). The rest of your runs are easy. Strides can sit at the end of an easy run.

Female athletes can map their cycle phases and adapt training around them with the Menstrual Cycle tool.

↗ **Menstrual Cycle** tccoaching.co.uk/tools/menstrual-cycle

DELOAD WEEKS

A deload week is a lighter week that lets the training land. The work you do builds the stress. The deload week is where you absorb it.



- Standard: three weeks building, then one deload week.
- Beginners, and athletes over 50 coming back into the sport: two weeks building and one deload, then repeat, may be the way forward.

It's not a hard and fast rule. Listen to your body, look at how training is progressing and how you feel, and check you're looking after the recovery side (Chapter 8).

REST DAYS

Running is hard on the body in a way that swimming and cycling aren't. Most runners do best with at least one full rest day a week, and a walk counts as rest.

If you need a second day off for logistical reasons, take it. It will help. Either way, every week has at least one day where nothing is hard.

MAKE IT YOURS

If you're over 50 and coming back, or new to the sport, try 2:1 for the first block and see how you feel. If you're recovering well and progressing, 3:1 may suit you better from the second block. If your recovery habits slip, expect to need the deload sooner.

THE RULES BEHIND THE FLEX

MOVING SESSIONS

When the week goes out of shape, these are the rules for moving things around.

1. Hard sessions need about 48 hours between them. Never hard runs on consecutive days.
2. The quality session and the long run not back to back without an easy day between.
3. No heavy strength the day before a **[KEY]** session or the long run.
4. Strength can sit on the same day as a hard run, after it, so the hard days stay hard and the easy days stay easy.
5. An easy run can go almost anywhere.
6. Move a session a day either way before you drop it.
7. Put **[KEY]** sessions on your most reliable days.
8. Use the Weekly Planner's Training Windows to find the gap.

↗ **Weekly Planner** tccoaching.co.uk/tools/week-planner

STRIDES

Short, relaxed, fast efforts of about 20 seconds at the end of an easy run, with full recovery between. They keep your legs used to moving quickly without the cost of a hard session.

THE LONG RUN

The long run builds steadily, not in big jumps. In the off-season it's easy, by heart rate and RPE. Race-pace work in the long run belongs to the race build.

THE MISTAKE I SEE MOST

Chasing mileage, and a long run that grows too fast.

The fix: build the long run steadily and let strength do the heavy lifting for durability. More miles is not the same as more fitness.

MAKE IT YOURS

Work out your most reliable days on the My Reliable Days worksheet, and put your [KEY] sessions there first.



CHAPTER 07

STRENGTH AND PLYOMETRICS

THE SHORT VERSION

Lift heavy, twice a week, for an hour. Running won't make you strong.

WHY NOW

The niggles I see most in runners are knees, Achilles and calves. They usually come down to a lack of strength and durability as runners step up their training intensity and volume. That's why strength plays a vital part.

And it's the first thing to go when the race build ramps up. The long runs take the time, and the gym is the session that quietly disappears. So the off-season is where you build the foundation.

> Strength is there to protect the body and make sure that we maintain a higher level of availability for training throughout the entire season.

> Your body becomes efficient at the paces that you train at. But the off-season doesn't mean endless mileage at race pace. High-intensity efforts, coupled with strength and some threshold work, build the solid foundations that give you the durability to hold those race paces for longer in your race-specific preparation.
>
> TOM

THE MISTAKE I SEE MOST

Skipping strength, and expecting running to make you strong.

The fix: building muscle and strengthening joints needs a significant load put through the body. Running can't replicate it. You have to lift.

HOW OFTEN, HOW LONG, HOW HEAVY

HOW OFTEN

2 a week

As standard. If niggles kept coming up last season, three a week, with durability and injury resistance as your off-season focus.

HOW LONG

About an hour

Long enough to take your rest periods properly and lift with the right intensity, rather than rushing through.

HOW HEAVY

RPE 8 to 9

Proper strength training, heavy, by RPE. Muscular and strength endurance have their place, but to get strong, you lift heavy.

WHEN

Not the day before

No heavy strength the day before a [KEY] session or the long run.

WHAT IT'S FOR

Your strength work in the off-season has four jobs:

DURABILITY

The ability to keep holding form, and keep absorbing training, as the miles build.

SINGLE-LEG STRENGTH

Running is done one leg at a time. Your test showed you the gap between sides.

POSTERIOR CHAIN, CALVES AND HIPS

Glutes, hamstrings and calves, with eccentric calf work for the Achilles, plus hip and core strength to keep the knees tracking well.

EXPLOSIVE POWER AND PLYOMETRICS

Force produced quickly, and the springiness that comes from jumping, bounding and skipping. More on the next page.

This guide doesn't prescribe the sessions themselves. What you lift, and how, depends on your Foundational Strength Assessment. That's what The TC Coaching Marathon Off-Season Plan and 1:1 coaching are for.

WHERE THE NIGGLES COME FROM, AND WHAT THE STRENGTH WORK TARGETS

NIGGLE	WHAT USUALLY NEEDS WORK
Knees	Glutes, hips and single-leg control, so the knee tracks well as you tire.
Achilles	Eccentric calf strength, and the springiness plyometrics build.
Calves	Calf strength and endurance, single leg as well as double.
Hips and back	Posterior chain and core strength, to hold your posture late in a run.

These are common patterns, not a diagnosis. Pain that sticks around is a conversation with your coach or a rehab specialist.

DON'T LEAVE OUT PLYOMETRICS

Not everyone needs high-end plyometrics. But even low-end work, like skipping in a warm-up, increases tendon elasticity and strengthens your joints.

It costs you a few minutes, and it is easy to fold into sessions you are already doing.



THE MISTAKE I SEE MOST

Leaving plyometrics out altogether.

The fix: start low. Skipping, pogo hops and small jumps in your warm-ups. Build from there if your body handles it.

INTO RACE SEASON

Strength doesn't stop when the race season starts. It changes.

NOW: OFF-SEASON

Heavy, at RPE 8 to 9. Building the foundation: strength, durability, single-leg control and power.

LATER: RACE SEASON

More specific. Lower load and more reps, moving into muscular and strength endurance.

MAKE IT YOURS

If niggles kept coming up last season, make strength your off-season focus: three sessions a week, with the time coming out of an easy run. If not, two sessions, done properly, every week.

CHAPTER 08

RECOVERY

THE SHORT VERSION

This is the time to build the recovery habits, so that by race season they're automatic.

Sleep, water, steps and stress are the easiest things to cast aside in the off-season. They matter just as much, probably more, because the habits you build now set up the mindset for race season, when everything gets more hectic and logistics take over.

SLEEP: START WITH AN AUDIT

Before you change anything, find out where you are. Take your average hours of sleep across the last two weeks. Your watch or phone may already have it. If not, write down when you went to bed and when you got up, every day for two weeks.

ROUTINE MATTERS MOST

> Same bedtime. Same wake time. Every day, as near as you can.

Your environment matters too: dark, slightly cold, no clutter, and the phone out of the bedroom. But the routine is the biggest thing.

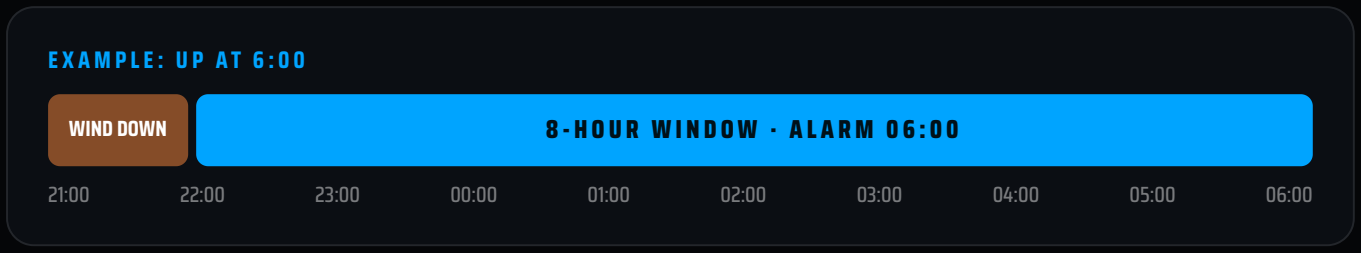
Why it matters: your body regenerates when you sleep. Sleep is linked to your performance, and to your chance of getting injured. Training hard on short sleep is training without the part that makes the training work.

MAKE IT YOURS

Fill in the My Sleep Audit worksheet. Two weeks, the hours each night, and the average.

WORK BACKWARDS FROM YOUR ALARM

Start with your wake time and count back. Give yourself a window of at least 8 hours, so you have a chance of 7.5 to 8 hours' sleep.



Up at 6:00 but in bed at midnight means 6 hours at the very most. When you're training for a marathon, that's sustainable, but it's far from optimal.

PLAN THE HALF HOUR BEFORE BED

The wind-down is a routine of its own. Plan it, and it stops depending on willpower at 10pm.

SET AN ALARM

On your watch or phone, for the start of the wind-down, not just the morning.

PHONE ON CHARGE

In another room.

HOT SHOWER

Part of the signal that the day is done.

SKINCARE ROUTINE

Whatever yours is. The point is that it happens in the same order, every night.

OFF SCREENS

Wind down away from them.

CAFFEINE

This one is really important. Caffeine late in the day can wreck your sleep without you noticing.

↗ **Caffeine Curfew** tccoaching.co.uk/tools/caffeine

RECOVERY · WATER

THE TWO-BOTTLE METHOD

My rule of thumb is 3 litres a day, not counting what's in your training bottles. Needs vary with body size and sweat, so treat 3 litres as a starting point.

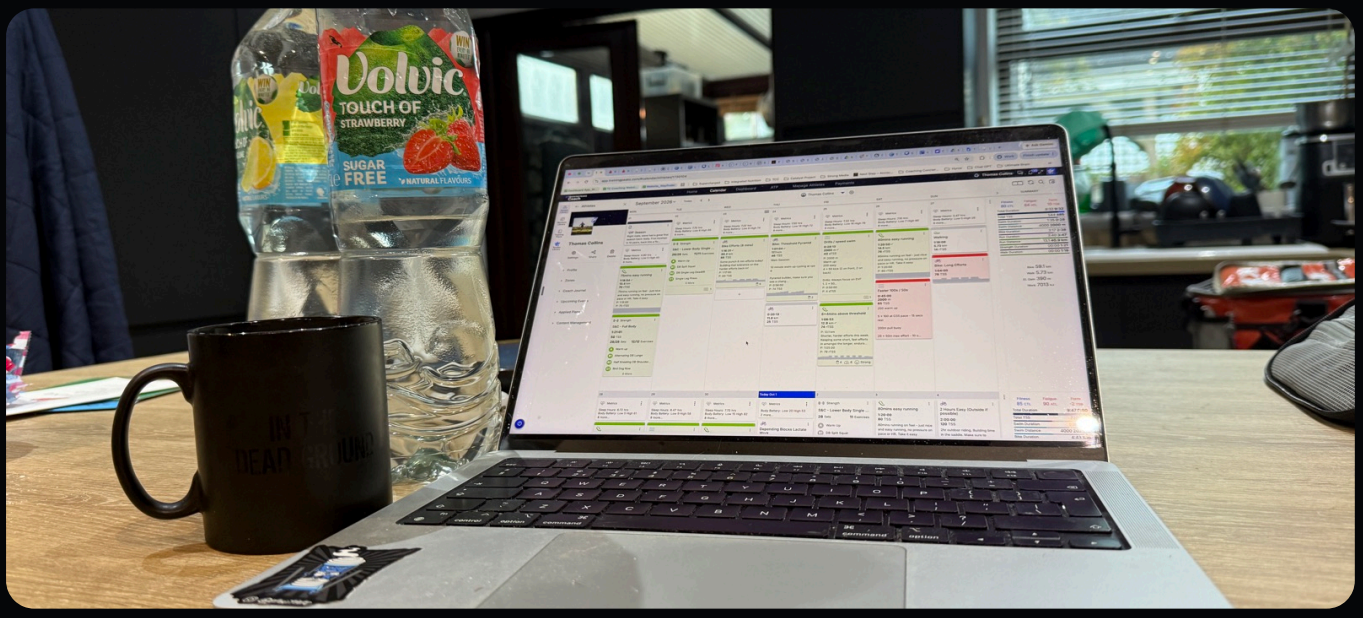
Here's what I do, every night. As part of my bedtime routine I fill two 1.5 litre bottles and leave them on the kitchen counter or in the fridge. Over the next day I drink them. At the end of the day I can see I've had at least 3 litres.

BEDTIME
Fill two 1.5 litre bottles and leave them on the kitchen counter, or in the fridge.

THROUGH THE DAY
Drink from them. Work, school run, the car, the desk.

END OF THE DAY
Both empty means at least 3 litres. Water left means it gets drunk now.

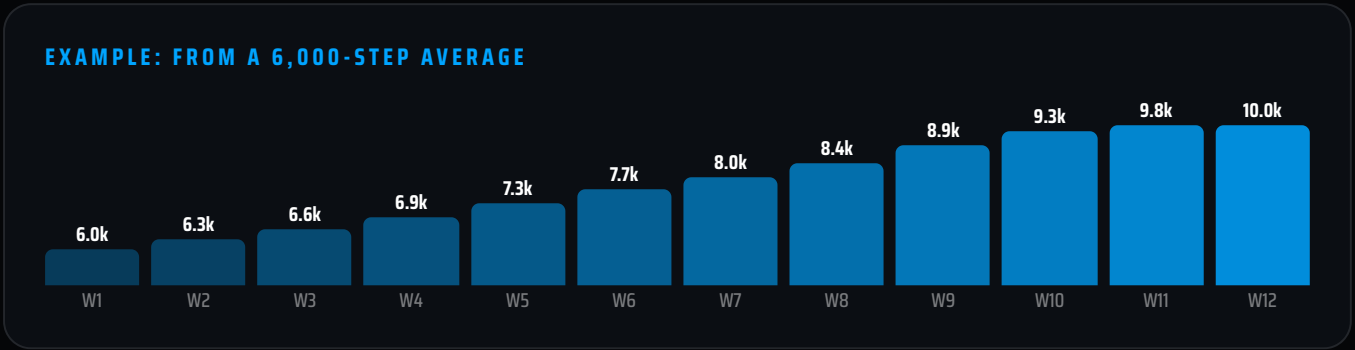
Water left at the end of the day gets drunk. It might mean a trip to the toilet in the night, but that's what changes the behaviour. You learn to drink earlier.



↗ **The two-bottle hydration standard** tccoaching.co.uk/insights/two-bottle-hydration-standard

STEPS AND DAILY MOVEMENT

There's no hard and fast rule. Audit your daily steps across the last two weeks, then add about 5% a week until you're somewhere around 10,000. Moving more, outside where you can, is always positive.



STRESS AND LIFE LOAD

The general adaptation syndrome (GAS) model says physical and mental stress add up, and your body doesn't tell the two apart. A hard week at work and a hard week of training draw on the same account.

High stress affects your motivation, your appetite and your willingness to train. It can bring real dips in training and performance.

One way to balance it: the systems and processes that create structure. When the routine is set, the training stops being one more thing to decide. Structure creates freedom.

TRAINING + LIFE

ONE BUCKET

ALCOHOL

You probably already know this, so I'll keep it short and there's no judgement here. Alcohol means poorer sleep and recovery, less effective fat metabolism, and a body that prioritises getting rid of the alcohol over absorbing your nutrients.

WHEN YOU'RE ILL: RECOVERY IS THE MISSION

When you're ill, training stops being the job. Getting well is the job.

SLEEP
As much as you physically can.

WALK OUTSIDE
Instead of training.

DRINK WATER
Keep the bottles going.

WHOLE FOODS
Vitamins, and even more emphasis on whole, nutrient-dense food.

Come back easy once you're well. If in doubt, speak to your GP before you train.

TRACKING

Track your sleep, water, steps and training. Not for the sake of the data, but because it builds awareness of your patterns, and of the disruption to them.

Awareness drives behaviour change. You can't fix the Thursday you always sleep badly until you've seen that it's always Thursday. A tick on a page is enough. You don't need an app.

EXAMPLE WEEK

	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
Sleep	✓	✓	✓	·	✓	✓	✓
Water	✓	✓	✓	✓	·	✓	✓
Steps	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Training	✓	✓	·	✓	✓	·	✓

The My Week on a Page tracker in the appendix puts your training ticks and these habits on one printable page.

MAKE IT YOURS

Pick one habit to start with, the one your audit says is weakest, and track it every day for a fortnight. Add the next when the first one sticks.

CHAPTER 09

NUTRITION AND BODY COMPOSITION

THE SHORT VERSION

The off-season can be the time to dial in your nutrition. Keep it simple, and fuel the training first.

I'll be honest with you. Most years I put on weight over the season. I prioritise fuelling, and eating to recover, and in the pursuit of performance that can tip over into eating more than I need.

So I use the off-season to dial in my nutrition, and start the race season in the shape I want to be in.

START WITH YOUR NUMBERS

The TDEE Calculator estimates how much energy you use in a day. It's a starting point for understanding what your body needs, not a diet.

↗ **TDEE Calculator** tccoaching.co.uk/tools/tdee

KEEP IT SIMPLE

- Fuel the sessions that matter. Eat well before your [KEY] runs and your strength sessions, and don't run them on empty.
- Eat to recover. A proper meal after the long run and after strength.
- Start the fuelling habit now. Take some fuel on your longer runs, so it's second nature by the race build.
- Build meals around whole, nutrient-dense food, and keep the rest in proportion.
- If your needs are more specific than that, get help from a qualified nutrition professional.

If body composition is one of your goals this off-season, keep it a light touch. It's optional, and it never comes at the cost of your routine, your strength work or your recovery.

THE MISTAKE I SEE MOST

Eating more than you need, in the name of performance.

The fix: fuel the training properly, and use the off-season to bring it back in line with what you actually need.

CHAPTER 10

WHEN THE ROUTINE GETS KNOCKED

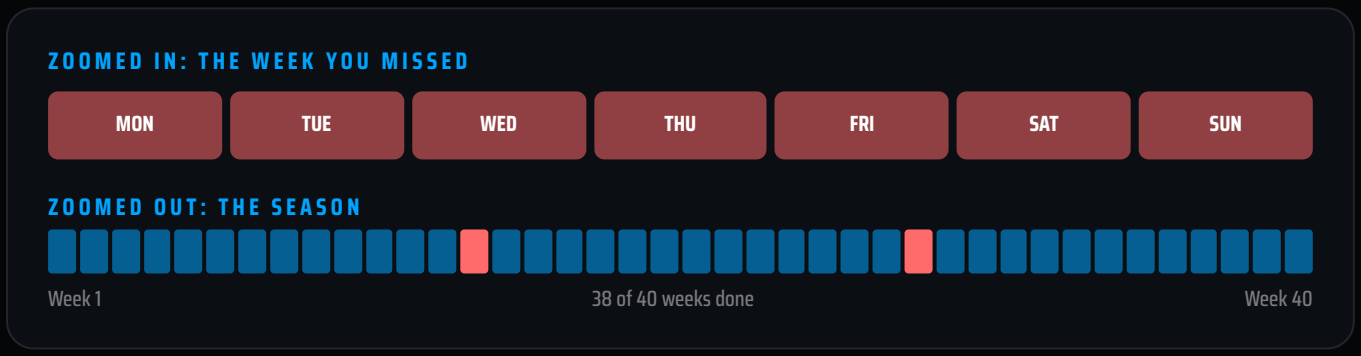
THE SHORT VERSION

Zoom out. One week doesn't matter across a season. The same week missed every month does.

Weeks get missed. Injury, illness, work, family. It happens to every athlete I've ever coached, and it will happen to you this off-season.

ZOOM OUT

Through a narrow lens, a single missed week looks like the end of the world. Zoom out to the whole season and, as long as the consistency holds, it barely shows.



THE WEEK THAT KEEPS COMING BACK

The real problem isn't one missed week. It's the same week, missed every month.



That's usually down to the systems you have in place, or to training too hard and then needing time off. The fix: reduce the volume and intensity to protect the consistency.

THE MISTAKE I SEE MOST

Training so hard one week that you need time off the next.

The fix: the right amount, every week, beats a big week followed by a lost one.

WHEN THE WEEK SHRINKS

THE DROP LADDER

What goes first, in order. Start at the top and stop as soon as the week fits.

1	**Add-ons and extras**	The extra bits first.
2	**Length of easy runs**	Shorten before you skip.
3	**Standalone mobility**	Fold it into your warm-ups.
4	**An easy run**	The long run always stays.
5	**The third strength session, if you have one**	One strength session always stays.
6	**Intensity sharpeners**	Strides and the short, sharp extras.

> Shorten, then move, then drop. And don't stack sessions to catch up.

MAKE IT YOURS

Your limiter changes the ladder. The steps stay the same, but what sits on each rung is yours. Here are two versions side by side. Write your own on the My Drop Ladder worksheet.

EXAMPLE TWO ATHLETES, TWO LADDERS

SPEED

1	Add-ons and extras
2	Shorten the easy runs
3	Mobility into warm-ups
4	An easy run
5	The third strength session
6	Strides

The quality session and the long run stay.

DURABILITY

1	Add-ons and extras
2	Shorten the easy runs
3	Mobility into warm-ups
4	Strides
5	An easy run
6	Some of the quality work

Strength and the long run stay.

THE NEVER-DROP LIST

However small the week gets, these stay.

- [KEY] sessions
- One strength session
- The long run
- Easy stays easy
- Deload weeks
- Sleep
- Telling your coach, if you have one
- Logging what you did

> "I'd far rather know on the Tuesday than find out three weeks later."

THE LOST WEEK RESCUE

When a week goes, it goes. Here's how to come out of it.

1 CALL IT
Decide the week is lost, and log what happened.

2 SALVAGE WHAT'S LEFT
The [KEY] session, and one short session.

3 DON'T MAKE IT UP
No catch-up week, no stacking.

4 COME BACK TO THE PLAN
As written, or one notch lower.

5 PROTECT THE FIRST SESSION BACK
Easy, and it happens.

6 LOOK FOR THE PATTERN
Is this the week that keeps coming back?

THE COMEBACK SCALE

WHAT YOU LOST	WHAT HAPPENS NEXT
A few sessions	Carry on.
One week	Resume the plan.
Two weeks	Repeat the last good week, then carry on.
Three or more	Step back a week. Go by RPE and feel. Don't rush to retest.
Illness	Recovery is the mission (Chapter 8).
Pain or injury	Stop, and speak to your coach or a rehab specialist.

MAKE IT YOURS

Cut out the Lost Week Rescue Card in the appendix and keep it somewhere you'll see it. The worst time to work out what to do is in the middle of the lost week.

CHAPTER 11

THE OFF-SEASON CURVEBALLS

THE SHORT VERSION

Most off-season disruption is predictable. Plan for it now.

None of these should come as a surprise. They happen every winter. So plan for them before they arrive, not when they do.

DARK MORNINGS AND EVENINGS

A head torch, something bright to wear, and well-lit routes. The treadmill for the quality sessions if it's safer.

ICE AND BAD WEATHER

A treadmill run is not a lesser run. On ice, swap the session or the day rather than risk a fall.

CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR

Decide now whether it runs as floor weeks, or takes the place of a deload week.

GYM TIMETABLES

Holiday opening hours change. Update “doors open” in the planner and re-run it. One strength session a week is still the rule.

YEAR-END AT WORK

Have your floor week ready before it arrives.

WINTER BUGS

Recovery is the mission (Chapter 8).

JANUARY ENTHUSIASM

Don't let a burst of motivation become a big jump in load, or an extra race. The plan was right in December too.

CHAPTER 12

THE OFF-SEASON MISTAKES I SEE MOST

THE SHORT VERSION

Nine mistakes, and the fix for each.

1. **"The race is ages away, so missing training won't matter."** CH 01
   The fix: Treat these 12 weeks as the start of the season, not a gap before it.

2. **Easy runs that aren't easy.** CH 06
   The fix: Run easy by heart rate and RPE, not pace, so the hard runs can be hard.

3. **Chasing mileage, or a long run that grows too fast.** CH 06
   The fix: Build the long run steadily and let strength do the heavy lifting for durability.

4. **Skipping strength, and expecting running to make you strong.** CH 07
   The fix: Lift heavy, twice a week, for about an hour.

5. **Running through niggles.** CH 10
   The fix: Knees, Achilles, calves: stop, and speak to your coach or a rehab specialist. A few days now beats a few weeks later.

6 **Racing the off-season.** CH 06
The fix: Hard sessions are hard, but they're not races, and neither is every parkrun. Save racing for race season.

7 **Going all in, then burning out or falling off.** CH 05
The fix: Ramp in over the first month, and judge each week by the floor.

8 **Leaving out plyometrics.** CH 07
The fix: Start low: skipping and small hops in your warm-ups.

9 **Testing too often, and chasing numbers.** CH 03
The fix: Test when you start, then once each off-season. Trust the process.

EVERY ONE OF THESE IS A CONSISTENCY PROBLEM

Look down the list again. Burning out, getting injured, chasing numbers, a lost week every month. They all end in the same place: weeks you don't get back. Fix the thing that breaks your consistency, and the fitness takes care of itself.

CHAPTER 13

WHAT 12 WEEKS LOOKS LIKE

THE SHORT VERSION

Here's the shape. Yours depends on your testing, your last season and your life.

EXAMPLE **A 12-WEEK OFF-SEASON**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
TEST			DELOAD				DELOAD				REVIEW

WEEK	WHAT IT IS
1	Testing week. RPE only.
2 to 3	Build. The routine settling in (first-timers ramp in from 60 to 70%). Intensity from Week 2 at 80/20. Strength twice a week.
4	Deload week.
5 to 7	Build.
8	Deload week.
9 to 10	Build. The long run keeps building steadily.
11	Last build week, same sessions as Week 10.
12	Lighter week, Off-Season Review, and into race season.

Beginners, and athletes over 50 coming back: the 2:1 pattern from Chapter 6 works here too. Holidays land where they land. Swap them with the nearest deload week, or run them as floor weeks.

EXAMPLE ONE ATHLETE, THREE WEEKS

The same example athlete, in a full week and a standard week. Same [KEY] sessions, less around them.

FULL WEEK — 7 TO 8 HOURS

Mon	Run: Easy Z2
Tue	**[KEY]** Run: Threshold Intervals · Strength: Full Body Functional (about 1h)
Wed	Run: Easy Z2
Thu	Run: Easy Z2 with Strides · Strength: Full Body Functional (about 1h)
Fri	Rest, or a walk
Sat	Run: Easy Z2
Sun	**[KEY]** Run: Long Aerobic

STANDARD WEEK — 6 TO 7 HOURS

Mon	Rest, or a walk
Tue	**[KEY]** Run: Threshold Intervals · Strength: Full Body Functional (about 1h)
Wed	Run: Easy Z2
Thu	Strength: Full Body Functional (about 1h)
Fri	Rest, or a walk
Sat	Run: Easy Z2 with Strides
Sun	**[KEY]** Run: Long Aerobic

[KEY] = this week's priority sessions. Every session has a job, but if life gets in the way, protect these first.

EXAMPLE THE FLOOR WEEK

FLOOR WEEK — 5 HOURS

Mon	Rest, or a walk
Tue	[KEY] Run: Threshold Intervals · Strength: Full Body Functional (about 1h)
Wed	Rest, or a walk
Thu	Run: Easy Z2 with Strides · Strength: Full Body Functional (about 1h)
Fri	Rest, or a walk
Sat	Rest, or a walk
Sun	[KEY] Run: Long Aerobic

[KEY] = this week's priority sessions. Every session has a job, but if life gets in the way, protect these first.

HOW IT CHANGES WITH THE LIMITER

SPEED

- An easy run or two
- 1 threshold session
- 1 long run
- 2 strength

[KEY] on the quality session and the long run.

DURABILITY

- Easy runs
- 1 quality session
- 1 long run, built steadily
- 2 to 3 strength

[KEY] on one strength session and the long run.

NIGGLES ALL SEASON

- Fewer, easier runs
- 1 quality session
- 1 long run
- 3 strength

[KEY] on one strength session, the quality session and the long run.

MAKE IT YOURS

Build your own three weeks in the Weekly Planner, starting with your limiter from Chapter 4. Then write them onto the My Three Weeks worksheet.



CHAPTER 14

FINISHING THE OFF-SEASON

THE SHORT VERSION

Review the whole off-season, not just the numbers, then move into race season with intent.

THE OFF-SEASON REVIEW

Week 12 is a lighter week, not another test. Look at your consistency across the board:

TRAINING	SLEEP	HYDRATION
NUTRITION	STEPS	RECOVERY HABITS

- Use your 12 weekly tracker pages as the evidence. They'll tell you more than any single test.
- If you added a test along the way, read it in context (Chapter 3). Twelve weeks of aerobic work builds durability, the ability to go further, and that may not show as a higher threshold number.
- Write it all down on the My Off-Season Review worksheet.

READY FOR RACE SEASON?

Tick these off honestly.

- [ ] Every week hit the floor, and most hit standard or above.
- [ ] Hard sessions feel easier than they did in Week 2, and you know why.
- [ ] Strength is a habit, not a project.
- [ ] Recovery habits are automatic: the sleep routine, the water, the steps.
- [ ] Easy sessions are genuinely easy, and hard sessions are genuinely hard.
- [ ] You know your worst day of the week, and you plan around it.
- [ ] You know your limiter going into race season.

WHAT CHANGES IN RACE SEASON

MORE SPECIFIC

Race-pace work comes in, including race pace at the end of the long run.

STRENGTH SHIFTS

Towards muscular and strength endurance.

FUELLING PRACTICE

Comes into your long runs, every one of them.

TRAIN FOR THE COURSE

A hilly course means hills in your race prep.

Every race is different. My Event Strategy race guides cover the course, pacing and fuelling, race by race.

↗ **Event Strategy race guides** tccoaching.co.uk/event-strategy



CHAPTER 15

NEXT STEP

THE SHORT VERSION

Thank you for reading. Here's where to go from here.

You're on my mailing list now, so you'll get my weekly tips, new tools, articles and insights as they come out. If you want to go further, there are two ways I can help.

THE TC COACHING MARATHON OFF-SEASON PLAN

$97 (about £72) · 12 weeks

The actual sessions, week by week, in TrainingPeaks. Everything in this guide, turned into your 12 weeks, with a weekly education video from my Legacy Playbook. Find it at tccoaching.co.uk/offseason/marathon.

1:1 COACHING

Always available

A specific, individual guide through your off-season and into race season, built around your testing, your last season and your life. Apply at tccoaching.co.uk/apply.

JOIN THE OFF-SEASON WHATSAPP GROUP

FREE

Ask questions of the group, or of me. https://chat.whatsapp.com/G7PRpE7ed7RC2RQECdLRKc

If nothing changes, nothing changes.

APPENDIX

WORKSHEETS, RPE, TOOLS AND GLOSSARY

Everything in this section is built to print. Black and white, plenty of room to write.

PAGE 49

TOOLS DIRECTORY

Every free tool in this guide, with its address.

PAGE 50

RPE TABLE

Effort out of 10, for when you don't have a device.

PAGE 51

GLOSSARY

Every term in this guide, in a line.

PAGES 52 TO 60

WORKSHEETS

Eleven worksheets, from your test results to your Off-Season Review.

THE WORKSHEETS

1. My Off-Season at a Glance
2. My Test Results
3. My Last Season
4. My Three Weeks
5. My Week on a Page (print one for every week)
6. My Sleep Audit
7. My Steps Audit
8. My Drop Ladder
9. My Reliable Days
10. Lost Week Rescue Card
11. My Off-Season Review

TOOLS DIRECTORY

All free, all on tccoaching.co.uk.

TOOL	ADDRESS	USE IT FOR
Weekly Planner	tccoaching.co.uk/tools/week-planner	Building the routine and your three weeks (Ch 5, 13)
Run Threshold Calculator	tccoaching.co.uk/tools/run-threshold	Run test and pace zones (Ch 3)
Heart Rate Zones	tccoaching.co.uk/tools/heart-rate-zones	Heart rate zones and easy sessions (Ch 3, 6)
RPE Explained	tccoaching.co.uk/tools/rpe	Effort without a device (Ch 3, 6)
Pace & Speed	tccoaching.co.uk/tools/pace	Converting run paces (Ch 3)
Caffeine Curfew	tccoaching.co.uk/tools/caffeine	Your caffeine cut-off for better sleep (Ch 8)
TDEE Calculator	tccoaching.co.uk/tools/tdee	Daily energy needs (Ch 9)
Menstrual Cycle	tccoaching.co.uk/tools/menstrual-cycle	Adapting training to your cycle (Ch 6)
Event Strategy	tccoaching.co.uk/event-strategy	Race guides: course, pacing and fuelling (Ch 14)
Two-bottle hydration	tccoaching.co.uk/insights/two-bottle-hydration-standard	The water method (Ch 8)
All free tools	tccoaching.co.uk/tools	Every tool in one place
Plan resources	tccoaching.co.uk/offseason-resources	Lessons, downloads and tools for plan members
Apply	tccoaching.co.uk/apply	Apply for 1:1 coaching (Ch 15)

RPE: EFFORT OUT OF 10

Rate of perceived exertion. Use it when you don't have a device, or when the numbers and your body disagree.

RPE	WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
1	Very easy. Recovery. You could sing.
2 to 4	Easy. Full conversation. Could hold it all day. Zones 1 and 2, aerobic base.
5 to 6	Somewhat hard. Short sentences. Zone 3, tempo.
7	Hard. A few words only. Zone 4, threshold.
8	Very hard. A word or two. Zone 5, VO2 max intervals.
9	Extremely hard. Near-max. Cannot talk.
10	Maximal. All-out. Sprints and tests only.

More on RPE: tccoaching.co.uk/tools/rpe. TC Coaching athletes also have the RPE tool in the Wayfinder app, under TCC Planning Tools.

GLOSSARY

MARATHON 42.2km (26.2 miles).

STRIDES Short, relaxed, fast efforts of about 20 seconds, usually at the end of an easy run.

LONG RUN The week's longest run. Easy in the off-season.

OFF-SEASON The 12-week foundation block before your race build, started whenever you have 12 weeks before it.

RACE SEASON The months of race-specific preparation and racing.

THRESHOLD PACE The fastest pace you can hold evenly for about 30 minutes to an hour.

RPE Rate of perceived exertion. Effort out of 10.

ZONE 2 Easy aerobic training. Conversational.

80/20 About 80% of training easy and 20% hard.

GREY ZONE The middle ground: too hard to be easy, too easy to be hard.

THRESHOLD The highest effort you can sustain for a long time before fatigue builds fast.

VO2 MAX Your maximum rate of using oxygen. VO2 max work is short, very hard efforts.

LIMITER The specific weakness that holds your race back the most, not just a whole discipline.

[KEY] SESSION A priority session. If life gets in the way, protect these first.

FULL / STANDARD / FLOOR WEEK Your three versions of a week: the ceiling, the normal, and the minimum.

DELOAD WEEK A lighter week that lets the training land.

3-REP MAX (3RM) The heaviest weight you can lift for three clean reps.

PLYOMETRICS Jumping, bounding and skipping, for tendon elasticity and power.

GAS MODEL General adaptation syndrome. Physical and mental stress add up in one bucket.

TDEE Total daily energy expenditure. The energy you use in a day.

TESTING WEEK Week 1: two tests, spaced so each gets a fair go.

OFF-SEASON REVIEW The Week 12 look back at your consistency, not just your numbers.

WORKSHEET 1

MY OFF-SEASON AT A GLANCE

Fill this in before Week 1.

My last race _____

Week 1 starts _____

Week 12 ends _____

Race build starts _____

My A race _____

Its date _____

WHY THIS OFF-SEASON MATTERS TO ME

WORKSHEET 2

MY TEST RESULTS

Week 1 now, next off-season to compare. Left and right separately.

TEST	WEEK 1	NEXT OFF-SEASON	CHANGE
Run threshold pace			
Run threshold heart rate			
Trap Bar Deadlift (3RM)			
Single-Leg Leg Press (3RM): left			
Single-Leg Leg Press (3RM): right			
Single-Leg Hamstring Curl (3RM): left			
Single-Leg Hamstring Curl (3RM): right			
Bench Press (3RM)			
Pull-up (assistance and reps)			
Front plank (max hold)			
Body weight			

MY ZONES, FROM THE TOOLS

WORKSHEET 3

MY LAST SEASON

Be specific. Be honest.

WHERE I FELL SHORT

NIGGLES, AND WHEN THEY STARTED

MISSED WEEKS, AND WHY

MY LIMITER, IN ONE SENTENCE

MY OFF-SEASON FOCUS

WORKSHEET 4

MY THREE WEEKS

Built in the Weekly Planner. Mark your [KEY] sessions.

DAY	FULL WEEK	STANDARD WEEK	FLOOR WEEK
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thu			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			
Hours			

WORKSHEET 5

MY WEEK ON A PAGE

Week ____ of 12 · Tier planned: Full / Standard / Floor · Print one for every week. Tick each session, and write [KEY] on your priority sessions.

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Session 1							
Session 2							
Strength							
Sleep (hours)							
Bedtime / wake							
Water (two bottles)							
Steps							
Stress (1 to 5)							

GOOD DECISIONS THIS WEEK

NEXT WEEK, I'LL

WORKSHEET 6 AND 7

MY SLEEP AND STEPS AUDITS

Two weeks of each, before you change anything.

DAY	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Sleep (h)														
Steps														

SLEEP

Average hours _____

My wake time _____

So my bedtime is _____

Wind-down starts _____

MY HALF HOUR BEFORE BED

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

STEPS

Two-week average _____

WEEK	TARGET (+5%)
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	

WORKSHEET 8 AND 9

MY DROP LADDER AND MY RELIABLE DAYS

What goes first, and where your [KEY] sessions go.

MY DROP LADDER: WHAT GOES FIRST WHEN THE WEEK SHRINKS

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Shorten, then move, then drop. Never on the ladder: [KEY] sessions, one strength session, the long run, sleep.

MY RELIABLE DAYS

DAY	RELIABLE	SOMETIMES	ALWAYS GOES WRONG	WHY
Mon	☐	☐	☐	
Tue	☐	☐	☐	
Wed	☐	☐	☐	
Thu	☐	☐	☐	
Fri	☐	☐	☐	
Sat	☐	☐	☐	
Sun	☐	☐	☐	

WORKSHEET 10

LOST WEEK RESCUE CARD

Cut it out. Keep it where you'll see it.

THE LOST WEEK RESCUE

- ☐ Call it: decide the week is lost, and log what happened.
- ☐ Salvage what's left: the [KEY] session, and one short session.
- ☐ Don't make it up: no catch-up week, no stacking.
- ☐ Come back to the plan as written, or one notch lower.
- ☐ Protect the first session back: easy, and it happens.
- ☐ Look for the pattern.

WHEN YOU'RE ILL: RECOVERY IS THE MISSION

- ☐ Sleep as much as you physically can.
- ☐ Walk outside instead of training.
- ☐ Drink water.
- ☐ Vitamins, and more whole, nutrient-dense food.
- ☐ Come back easy once you're well. If in doubt, speak to your GP.

Pain or injury: stop, and speak to your coach or a rehab specialist.

WORKSHEET 11

MY OFF-SEASON REVIEW

Week 12. Consistency first, numbers second.

AREA	HOW CONSISTENT? (1 TO 5)	WHAT I LEARNED
Training		
Sleep		
Water		
Steps		
Nutrition		

HOW HARD SESSIONS FEEL NOW, AGAINST WEEK 2

READY FOR RACE SEASON?

- [ ] Every week hit the floor, and most hit standard or above.
- [ ] Hard sessions feel easier than they did in Week 2, and you know why.
- [ ] Strength is a habit, not a project.
- [ ] Recovery habits are automatic: the sleep routine, the water, the steps.
- [ ] Easy sessions are genuinely easy, and hard sessions are genuinely hard.
- [ ] You know your worst day of the week, and you plan around it.
- [ ] You know your limiter going into race season.