

50 Marathons 50 days – Book review by Jo Knight

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I was curious to see how a body could physically and mentally adapt to running 50 marathons in 50 days. It was great to read about the different marathons in the US, other than the big ones like Boston and New York. Dean Karnazes obviously has one of those body's that thrives on super endurance sport. He has noted some secrets that I thought I'd pass on:

“KNOW WHEN TO SAY WHEN” (pg 36): I know this might seem obvious to some of you, but I'm sure we've all pushed our bodies to the limit at some stage during training or an event. Karnazes has some recommendations:

- *never run through more than moderate pain
- *stop running when dizzy
- *don't train when you know you're experiencing signs of overtraining.
- *don't run with a fever, flu diarrhea and food poisoning.

In regards to SLEEP (pg 51)...

Karnazes claims he didn't sleep nearly enough between marathons. He says research has shown the effects of sleep deprivation are cumulative- even an hour a night sleep deprivation, every night over a month is enough to cause a 10% decrease in cardiovascular performance.

The take home message: ensure you get your beauty sleep!

FLOW (pg 90)- a state of total absorption in a challenging activity. Karnazes recommendations for achieving 'FLOW'-

- *run with a specific goal (eg. time, tackle certain hill climb)
- *Eliminate distractions
- *Race only when fit and ready to race
- *Believe in your ability to achieve your goals and push doubt and fear out of your head!
- *Take it one step at a time, don't think about what lies ahead.

pg 135: Steep hill sprints-

This is why we make you do interval training! Karnazes recommends finding a steep hill and sprint up it for 10-12 seconds

. Walk back down, and repeat, building up to 8 repetitions. This builds a powerful stride and helps to reduce the risk of injury by strengthening running muscles.

pg. 143 “Runabout”

This is the name Karnazes has given to running distances in training that exceed the length of your event. For example, Karnazes will head out the door with food, fluid and credit card and run... for 6-8 hours. He might not run for all of that time, he'll take walking breaks, and stop for food and drink. The main point of this is to stay on your feet and move forward – this will help build endurance and also, confidence.

pg. 152 Something that struck a cord with me was how to overcome low motivation. Something I'm sure we've all come across. Karnazes recommends getting back in touch with the source of your passion to run/swim/cycle etc. When you have passion, you won't need the extra motivation. He claims that if burnout occurs, it's usually from focusing too much on the event, and not why he loves running. Think about what makes you passionate- it might be running off-road in the hills. If you're training for an on-road event, and you're burning out, take a few runs in the hills and rediscover your passion for running.

Also on the theme of psychology, he talks about motivation and recommends the following if you're in a rut (pg 154):

- *Change your route to somewhere new (this always works for me)
- *buy new clothes or shoes so you're excited about running/training
- *Train with a friend
- *Take a dog
- *tell yourself you're just out for a short run...you're bound to run for longer
- *drive somewhere for an interesting run eg. Hills, beach, park.
- *Change your pace- do something short and fast, or alternatively- long and slow.

He doesn't quote a specific study, but claims that 'research has shown' that consuming carbs while running (eg. via sports drink) reduces suppression on the immune system (pg 177).

"Just one more" (pg 191)... a tactic Karnazes believes works when you need to push yourself that little bit further. You might be struggling with your interval training, and still have 3 more reps. If you tell yourself there's just one more, it will seem more achievable. (nb. this tactic may be used in Spin Class!)

"Stay Positive, Heal Faster" (pg 212), Researchers from the University of Missouri found that soldiers who didn't complain to others about their suffering and injuries, probably had a stronger self belief in their ability to overcome suffering on their own. Karnazes says "don't wallow in your misery. Instead, channel the discouragement you may feel into a renewed commitment to overcome your setback. Fight harder and you'll heal faster".

Here's a goodie- "Preventing Muscle Cramps" (pg 222). Karnazes rightly states that muscle cramps appear to be caused in most cases by tendon fatigue when exercise is prolonged. Of course there are also other factors such as dehydration and electrolyte depletion (they're not the most common causes of cramp, but can have an effect on it).

This is where smart training comes in... gradually increasing the durations of your runs.

"Attack your Weakness" (pg 245)- Think about your weakness...is it lack of speed, lack of endurance, or lack of race fitness? Or, it could be your nutrition, pscyh skills...etc. Address this weakness, and work on it during training. To get the most out of your Complete Performance experience, it really helps us if you fill in the Event Review forms, as these often highlight the areas you need to improve on, and we can help you with this in the next phase of your program.

Overall, I thought this was an interesting read. It bought home to me why I enjoy training, and made me address my weaknesses. If I'm feeling flat on a long run, I'll be sure to tell myself to toughen up- at least I'm not running 50 marathons in 50 days!

Karnazes, D. (2008) *50 Marathons 50 days The Secrets To Super Endurance*. Australia: Allen & Unwin