



Q&A with New Jersey's Toughest Fitness Trainer

By [M. Tinlin](#) August 23, 2010

For anyone contemplating a fitness program, New Jersey Mom and Bootcamp Instructor [Tara Zimlik](#) offers some advice and answers the questions she hears most often. Tara is the founder of Tara's Bootcamp, which offers classes Branchburg and Flemington, NJ. Tara's bootcampers come to her with a variety of fitness goals: whether it is to lose significant weight, get back in shape, or train for a marathon.



Below Tara answers her most commonly asked questions.

Many people feel intimidated to run a long race such as a marathon. Any tips for those who believe they “can’t do it”?

With dedication and training, you can do anything. Just make sure to gradually build up to a marathon with progressive training. Run shorter races to build up your confidence. Take the pressure off by running an initial marathon without a time goal. Make your goal to finish strong with a smile across your face. I have helped many people run their first marathon and many more with this no pressure approach!

Is it realistic for someone who is normally a “couch potato” to complete the race their first time?

It is realistic for a “couch potato” to complete a 5K, 10K, half marathon or marathon. However each race must be looked at with ample training and progressively. Start with a 5K, build to a 10k, half marathon and you will find yourself much more prepared mentally and physically. Through this training you will be less likely to be walking the marathon (unless walking a marathon is your goal). You will have the endurance and stamina to go for the full 26.2 miles!

How does cross training (i.e., bootcamp) help prepare individuals for distance running?

Cross training workouts such as bootcamp workouts help in long distance running by building your stamina and endurance without overtraining by running too many miles. This will help you to build strength and speed and decrease the risk of injury. Additionally, by cross training and working your core in bootcamp-style workouts, you will find you will look better aesthetically and be less likely to be sidelined with an injury. You will also be less likely to grow tired of your routine if you mix it up with cross training, so mix it up with different workouts 2-3 days per week.

How did you adjust your training program while you were [pregnant](#) and after you gave [birth](#)?

When I was pregnant I adjusted my training program by running at a much easier pace. I never pushed myself to tempo or race pace. I just went out on my runs and took it easy so my heart rate was not beyond 150-160 beats per minute. After I gave birth I took a similar approach however I was able to sustain a higher rate while running without concern.

As a mom, how do you fit in marathon training with [your children](#)'s schedule?

It is very hard to fit in marathon training with the children but I make this work through time management. Some days I wake up at 4am because this is the only time I know I will have all day to squeeze a run in. Lately I have been sneaking out so early on Saturday that when I return the [family](#) is still asleep. The earlier the better, because as a dedicated mom, I always feel like I do not want to disrupt the children's schedule. On a recent Saturday once I was out on my run in the early hours of the morning I felt so strong knowing while most people are asleep I was out pounding the pavement for a twenty miler. What an amazing feeling! Running is what enhances my passion towards being a mom even more!

Running with a stroller has been said to be a great way to add weight resistance to your workout. What's the right form for running w/a stroller?

Running with a stroller is a great way to add resistance to your training and expose your children at a young age to health and

fitness. Children love stroller runs and you will see strength gains as well, both mentally and physically.

As for proper form: Hold on to the stroller handle with one hand or both if you feel more comfortable. Make sure to have the arm strap on if you would rather not hold the handle. If you are going down a hill, hold the stroller with both hands with hands near the hand brakes for safety. Never lean on the stroller, it is not there for support.

What is the idea training time table to prepare for a marathon?

I recommend a 20-week program but this time table will increase or decrease by 4 weeks depending upon your fitness level. Currently, I train on a 16-week time table because I am starting at a high fitness level. However, if you are new to running I recommend a 24-week program increasing your weekly mileage no more than 10% per week. This will decrease the risk of injury and keep your body from burning out too quickly.

Should you do races leading up to the big day?

Absolutely, races help to build up your confidence for race day and also are a great test of the time you will run on race day. Races are the best training resource to understand what the marathon day will feel like. There is nothing greater than standing at the start line with hundreds or thousands of other runners all in silence waiting for the gun to fire signaling the race start. I cannot find the surge of adrenaline in anything other than a race start. So make sure to get a few races under your belt so you will feel peace of mind on race day! Remember practice makes perfect 😊

Talk about gear – Running is relatively cheap. What should you save/splurge on?

First, get two pairs of shoes; One pair of shoes should be for racing (lightweight) and the other pair should be a stability shoe (heavier) for training runs.

Second, you should have electrolyte replacement fluid for longer runs since you need to replenish your electrolytes.

Third: Pick up energy gel; I love energy gel because when I am feeling my energy start to deplete at mile twelve energy gel gives me that extra boost. The potassium found in energy gel also helps in preventing muscle cramps.

Splurge on good running shoes, and healthy nutrient-dense food (such as salads, spinach, fruits). Both will pay off on race day. You will find the running shoes will last longer. As for the [healthy food](#), produce (vegetables, fruit) and nuts will provide you more energy to get a better time. You can only workout as good as the fuel you give your body.

How seriously should you take training/injuries while preparing for a marathon?

Marathon training should be taken very seriously because you can cause serious injuries that will last a lifetime such as runner's knee, plantar fasciitis, a torn ACL, meniscus, stress fracture, etc., all due to over training. So choose your training schedule wisely, or hire a training professional to meet with you for an hour to provide you a workout schedule, running tips, apparel tips, as well as injury prevention. This will be your best resource.

Any other tips you'd like to share, please feel free to add them here:

Marathons take a great deal of training to build up to the big day. On race day you have a surge of adrenaline. The best feeling is knowing that you have trained and prepared for this great event! When you cross the finish line you literally feel like you can conquer the world. You are feeling the endorphins from the run! A marathon is a great physical and mental test of strength. So if you are planning on running a marathon with a time goal or no goal of time at all, just remember to have fun because race days go very quickly. And after the race you will be getting home that evening and searching for your next marathon. It is addictive! Good Luck & Happy Racing!

About Tara Zimliki

Tara is a Certified Personal Trainer through The American Council on Exercise (ACE), and a Boot Camp Instructor. She has competed and trained with top athletes at the University of South Carolina where she was awarded a full cross-country scholarship. Tara has a B.A. from Rutgers University and specializes in fat loss and nutrition. She is passionate about helping people change both body and mind, believing positive results stem from positive attitudes. She helps clients maintain this attitude with fun, challenging and rewarding workouts.

Tara's love of fitness started as a child when she began running at the young age of 7. She played numerous sports but running was her passion. Tara enjoyed it so much that she continued running right up until she had children, completing the New York Marathon 8 [months pregnant](#) and even ran 1 mile the day she gave birth to her first daughter and 3 miles the day she gave birth to her second daughter. Tara has completed 15 Marathons and hundreds of races worldwide. In addition, she has won many 5Ks and placed top in many long distance runs. In 2008, Tara placed in the top 500 women for the NYC Marathon. Recently, she won the USATF New Balance Long Distance Grand Prix for women 34 & under for the 4th consecutive year. Tara's practices what she preaches in all aspects of fitness and health and for this reason, she is a trusted trainer that produces results.

For more information about Tara Zimliki or Tara's Boot Camp, please visit www.tarasbootcamp.com