

'Horrendous blisters': Retired UK banker, 65, attempts to run 200 marathons in 200 days

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- Do you know any endurance sports? Can you list them?
- Why do you think people like endurance sports, e.g. running ultramarathons, walking the Camino De Santiago, climbing Everest (Qomolangma) or doing The Ironman?
- Have you tried taking part in an event like this? Why / Why not?

2 Key words

a. Find the words from the wordpool in the article. Then use the words to complete the definitions.

| | | | |
|------------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| flare | muscle mass | stretch (myself) | calorie intake |
| gout | blisters | physically | flat out |
| raising money | on average | elite athlete | a walk in the park |
| found (his) feet | curveball | pints | itinerary |
| headed to | get going | working (his) way | |

- _____ are painful little bubbles filled with liquid that appear on your skin from rubbing or friction.
- A sudden problem or unexpected event that can cause difficulty is called a(n) _____.
- A(n) _____ is a plan of events, trips or activities you will do.
- Your _____ is the amount of energy you get from the food you eat.
- To _____ means (I) try a new physical challenge and improve (my) body.
- _____ means (he) became comfortable and confident in a new situation.
- Collecting money for a charity or cause is _____.
- If you do something as fast and hard as you can, you are going _____.

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9. A person who is extremely good at sports and trains professionally is an _____.
10. In Britain, _____ are large glasses of beer.
11. _____ is something is very easy to do.
12. To start doing something is to _____.
13. _____ is a disease that causes pain and swelling in your joints.
14. _____ means moved in the direction of a place.
15. _____ means reaching a goal step by step, slowly improving.
16. A(n) _____ means a sudden worsening or becoming more intense, often triggered by exercise or stress.
17. _____ is how much muscle you have in your body.
18. If something happens regularly or usually, it happens _____.

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity in the correct form.

1. After running 20 km in the heat, she got painful _____ on her toes.
2. During charity runs, participants try to _____ for local hospitals.
3. Usain Bolt is one of the most famous Jamaican _____.
4. Training for a marathon is not _____. It requires hard work and dedication.
5. Professional athletes carefully track their _____ to maintain energy during competitions.
6. The race organisers threw us a real _____ when the route was changed at the last minute.
7. It took him a few weeks to _____ after joining the new triathlon club.
8. After the long hike, we relaxed with a cold _____ of beer.

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9. If you want to get stronger and faster, it's important to _____ and challenge your limits.
10. Before the race, we had to _____ the Red Cross tent to get our First Aid Kit checked.
11. To reach the top in long-distance running, you have to _____ slowly, improving stage by stage.
12. On Sunday, we plan to _____ early to avoid the heat.
13. Our travel _____ included the best hiking trails in the city.
14. Marathon runners usually have low _____ because they cannot be too heavy.
15. During the sprint, he pushed himself _____ and gave everything he had.
16. People at our club run about 10 km per hour _____, but it depends on the route and weather.
17. After the long run in the mountains, she got a(n) _____ of an old knee pain.
18. Some older people suffer from _____, which can make their joints painful and swollen.

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Steve James, from Devon, hits halfway mark in circuit of Great Britain's coast as scientists monitor impact of extreme feat

Steven Morris
24 July, 2025

- 1 The first two weeks were difficult – terrible blisters, a flare of gout that needed a visit to A&E I realized that running 200 marathons in 200 days would not be a walk in the park.
- 2 But Steve James, a 65-year-old retired banker from Devon, has found his feet, and on Thursday reached the 100th day of his challenge.
- 3 "In those first two weeks I was thinking: 'What have I done?'" James said. "I've been running for 50 years and never get blisters – but I had horrendous ones for the first 10 days. The gout was a bit of curveball but the medicines they gave me worked."
- 4 Experts from the University of Exeter are following James's progress. They want to find out what the effects of such an extreme challenge on an older person are.
- 5 He started in Devon, in April and headed to Kent in south-east England. He then ran north to north-east Scotland and is on the Scottish west coast working his way south.
- 6 He has a plan, but it changes. "If you're in Devon and Cornwall and Wales, there is a clearly defined coast path. In Scotland there's virtually no coast path, so you're making your own routes. I've been on the Isle of Mull, which was never in the original itinerary, but I hopped on and off and it worked."
- 7 The challenge is to do, on average, a marathon every day. Some days it might be a bit less; others a bit more, and he is not trying to get good marathon times.
- 8 "I am not flat out every day. There's a lot of walking involved, a bit of jogging, a bit of running – a real mix. And I'm stopping a couple of times each day just to sort of rest up, if you like, have a coffee, a cake or whatever, and then get going again."
- 9 James said routine is important. "It's all about getting up at the same time, leaving at the same time; it's a bit like going to work. I love the physical challenge, the idea of stretching myself physically. I'm not especially talented at things – you wouldn't want to play golf with me, you wouldn't want me on your football team. But I can keep going."
- 10 He is not following the diet of an elite athlete. When the Guardian spoke to him, James had eaten cereal, a bacon baguette, cake and was planning fish and chips for dinner with a couple of pints.
- 11 The Exeter researchers assessed James before his challenge, and he sends them data daily. They are studying his calorie intake, oxygen and muscle mass levels to examine the effect of the challenge. He has lost about 10kg but the team has seen no negative effects on his health.
- 12 Freyja Haigh, a researcher at the University of Exeter, said that Steve is helping them to get a real insight into the impacts of endurance sports on the body of an older person.
- 13 James is also raising money for Cancer Research UK and the Scouts. While running he is listening to music and is also learning Welsh. By the time he gets to Wales, he hopes to be able to order a pint in the language.
- 14 He thinks the most difficult stretch physically will be the north coasts of Devon and Cornwall.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Are these sentences True (T) or False (F) according to the article?

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. Steve felt better after the first two weeks of his challenge. | T / F |
| 2. It was easy for Steve to deal with blisters because he gets them often. | T / F |
| 3. The scientists are keen to study Steve during his challenge because of his age. | T / F |
| 4. Steve is going from South to North. | T / F |
| 5. Steve is following a route he planned carefully in advance. | T / F |
| 6. Steve makes sure to run exactly a marathon a day. | T / F |
| 7. Steve isn't a very good runner, just a consistent one. | T / F |
| 8. Steve is eating healthy foods and avoiding alcohol during his challenge. | T / F |
| 9. The scientists who are monitoring him have seen no negative change in his health, although he lost weight. | T / F |
| 10. Steve runs in silence to focus on the task. | T / F |

4 Key language

a. Read the sentences from the article. Are they in the Past Simple (PS) or the Present Perfect (PP).

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1. What have I done? | PS / PP |
| 2. The gout was a bit of curveball but the medicines they gave me worked. | PS / PP |
| 3. He started in Devon, in April and headed to Kent in south-east England. | PS / PP |
| 4. I've been on the Isle of Mull, which was never in the original itinerary, but I hopped on and off and it worked. | PS / PP |
| 5. He has lost about 10 kg but the team has seen no negative effects on his health. | PS / PP |

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b. Discuss the questions:

- Why is the Present Perfect or the Past Simple used in each case? Think about:
 - Is the action connected to the present?
 - Is the action finished and clearly in the past?
 - Is there a specific time mentioned, or is the focus on experience or result?

c. Complete with the verbs in the correct tense.

1. I _____ (finish) my homework, so I can go to the gym.
2. She _____ (visit) Paris last summer.
3. We both _____ (do) the London marathon.
4. He _____ (start) his new training plan but it's not going well.
5. They _____ (lose) their phones, but luckily, they can pick up their race numbers with their IDs.
6. I _____ (read) that book ages ago.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- Do you think it's a good idea to run 200 marathons in 200 days? Why / Why not?
- Steve says he is not good at sports, but he can 'keep going'. Do you think this is a valuable skill to have? Why / Why not?
- How do you think he will feel after the challenge ends?

6 In your own words

a. In pairs or small groups, choose one of endurance events below and prepare a small presentation about it. You should include:

- what the event is
- when and where it takes place

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- why it is especially difficult
- what you have to do to participate, e.g. qualify with good times from another event, pay a fee and so on.
- what preparation a person needs for this event, including both training and equipment
- which rules the participants must follow during the event
- why this event is popular
- why people like participating and find it personally rewarding

Events:

- Camino De Santiago
- Ultramarathon Des Sables
- Oxfam Trailwalker Australia
- Hiking The Pacific Crest Trail or the Appalachian Trail
- Swimming across the English Channel
- Ironman World Championship Kona, Hawaii
- Manhattan Island Marathon Swim
- Race Across America (RAAM)
- Patagonian Expedition Race
- Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge Row
- Vasaloppet Annual Ski Race
- Spartathlon
- Yukon River Quest
- Badwater 135 Ultramarathon
- Finnmarksløpet Sled Dog Race

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- The Ötillö Winter Swim Series
- Iditarod Trail Invitational
- The Seven Summit Climb (ascending the highest mountain on each continent)

b. Give your presentation to the class.