

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

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- Do you know any endurance sports? Can you list them?
- Why do you think people engage in 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 using the correct form.

blisters	in a vice	flat out	calorie intake
flare	curveball	stretching (myself)	ill-effects
gout	steadily	physically	raising money
a walk in the park	carving out	elite athlete	acclimatised
found (his) feet	itinerary	pint	

1. _____ means going beyond (my) comfort zone, extremely challenging (my) body.
2. If your muscles or a body part feels like they're _____, they are under extreme pressure, as if being squeezed tightly.
3. _____ are serious consequences of something in sports, e.g. injuries and weakened immunity.
4. A(n) _____ is someone who performs at the very highest level of sport, often competing internationally.
5. _____ is a type of arthritis causing painful swelling, often linked to diet and metabolism.
6. Running _____ means giving your absolute maximum effort, leaving nothing in reserve.

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7. _____ something means creating and shaping it with consistent effort and dedication.
8. _____ are painful skin conditions, often caused by friction while doing exercise, in which liquid collects in a bubble of skin.
9. _____ means adjusted to different climate conditions like high altitude, heat, etc.
10. A(n) _____ is a detailed plan or schedule, such as the timing and routes for a multi-day hiking event.
11. Training _____ means progressing gradually, without sudden jumps, which is vital for endurance sports.
12. When symptoms of a disease _____, they suddenly get worse or more intense, often triggered by exercise or stress.
13. In the UK, meeting friends for a(n) _____ means going for a drink – usually beer – measured in about half a litre.
14. Saying something is _____ means it's extremely easy.
15. _____ means doing something that brings money to a cause, usually a charity.
16. _____ is the amount of energy contained in the food you consume.
17. _____ means (he) gradually became confident and comfortable in a new situation.
18. A(n) _____ is an unexpected challenge that forces you to adapt your strategy.

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

1. During the first week of high-altitude training, it took her several days to _____ and feel comfortable running.
2. He trained over six months, _____, increasing his mileage without injuring himself.

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3. The 5k Cancer Research Run was a fun way to _____ while also completing a personal challenge.
4. During the summer hike, he developed a painful _____ on his heel from new boots.
5. Recovering from the injury was not _____; it required patience and careful physiotherapy.
6. The unexpected storm was a real _____ for the cyclists, forcing them to change their route.
7. Many amateur runners underestimate how much they need to monitor their daily _____ to maintain performance and prevent rapid weight loss.
8. She pushed herself _____ during the final sprint of the ultramarathon, and used everything she had.
9. The physiotherapist warned him that continuing to train with such intensity could cause serious _____.
10. After winning the 2018 Boston Marathon, Yuki Kawauchi left his job as a government employee and became a(n) _____.
11. Their hiking trip will last several days so they are making a very detailed _____.
12. His joints were inflamed due to a sudden _____ of his arthritis, so he had to rest for a few days.
13. If you want to get stronger and faster, it's important to _____ and challenge your limits.
14. To build a successful sports career, she had to _____ a niche in ultra-distance running.
15. During altitude training camps, it is crucial for athletes to _____ properly to avoid altitude sickness.
16. He enjoyed meeting friends after practice for a cold _____ at the local pub.

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17. The doctor warned that poor diet and excessive alcohol could trigger _____, causing sudden pain in his joints.

18. That leg day at the gym really felt like putting my legs _____.

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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 fortnight was tough – terrible blisters, a flare of gout that needed a visit to A&E and the rapid realisation that running 200 marathons in 200 days around the coast of Great Britain 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 halfway mark – an average of 100 marathons in 100 days.
- 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. My feet felt like they had been put in a vice and squeezed. The gout was a bit of curveball but the hospital prescribed some stuff and it went away. Now I feel fine.”
- 4 James’s progress along the coastlines of England, Wales and Scotland is being tracked by experts from the University of Exeter, who are keen to find out the effects of such an extreme challenge on an older person.
- 5 He set off from Topsham, on the south coast of Devon, in April and headed to Kent in south-east England. He then ran north to John o’Groats in north-east Scotland and is on the Scottish west coast steadily working his way south.
- 6 There is no set route. He has a plan but adapts and changes it. “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 carving out 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, depending on where the accommodation is, it might be a bit less; others a bit more, and he is not trying to clock 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 “It’s all about routine,” said James, who is from Devon and trained for his challenge on Dartmoor. “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 sort of diet an elite athlete might adopt. When the Guardian spoke to him, James had eaten cereal, a bacon baguette, cake and was planning fish and chips for dinner, washed down with a couple of pints.
- 11 The Exeter researchers assessed James before his departure and he sends data daily for them to analyse. They are studying his calorie intake, oxygen levels and muscle measurements to examine the effect of the challenge. He has lost about 10kg but the team has seen no ill-effects to his health.
- 12 Freyja Haigh, a nutritional physiology researcher at the University of Exeter, said: “Steve gives us a real insight into how this type of endurance impacts the body of an older person. We’re unsure at the moment if Steve’s weight loss is from fat or muscle mass.”
- 13 James, who is raising money for Cancer Research UK and the Scouts, passes the time by listening to music and is also learning Cymraeg – 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. “I’m kind of hoping by then my body’s completely acclimatised and I’ll be able to cope with that.”

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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 takes his nutrition very seriously, eating healthy foods and avoiding alcohol. T / F
9. The scientists who are monitoring him have seen no negative changes 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 each sentence 1-4 from the article carefully. Then match them to the explanations of the Present Perfect tense's correct uses (A-C).

1. What have I done? A. Result / reflection – focuses on the current result of an action.
2. I've been on the Isle of Mull. B. Experience – talks about something someone has or hasn't done in their life, with no specific time.
3. The team has seen no ill-effects on his health. C. Change over time – emphasises a change that has happened from the past until now.
4. He has lost about 10kg since starting the challenge. C. Change over time – emphasises a change that has happened from the past until now.

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b. Translate sentences 1-4 from task a into your first language. Do not try to translate them to the same grammatical structure; focus on translating into the same meaning. Then answer the questions below.

1. Do all the sentences use the same tense in your first language?
2. Does your first language have a tense similar to the Present Perfect? If yes, is it used in the same way? If not, which tense do you use instead?

c. Complete the sentences using the correct form of the verbs in brackets: Present Perfect or Past Simple. For Present Perfect sentences, indicate if it is Result / reflection (R), Experience (E) or Change over time (C). For Past Simple (P), explain why you chose this tense and not Present Perfect.

1. I _____ (run) three ultramarathons so far this year.

R / E / C / P

2. Last weekend, Maria _____ (complete) her first 100 km hike.

R / E / C / P

3. He _____ (improve) his marathon time by 15 minutes since he started

R / E / C / P

training seriously.

4. We _____ (try) several new energy gels during our last few

R / E / C / P

training sessions.

5. They _____ (break) the team record in the relay last month.

R / E / C / P

6. I _____ (never / cycle) more than 200 km in one day.

R / E / C / P

7. John _____ (injure) his knee so he'll miss the weekend charity run.

R / E / C / P

8. She _____ (lose) about 5kg since she joined the triathlon club.

R / E / C / P

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- What do you think of Steve's challenge?
- Read the quote from the article. Why do you think it is rewarding for Steve to 'keep going'?

'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.'

6 In your own words

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

- what the event is
- when and where it takes place
- why it is especially difficult
- what you have to do to participate, e.g. qualify with good times from another event, pay a fee, etc.
- 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

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

b. Then give your presentation to the class.