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# Runners with higher emotional intelligence finish half marathons quicker

By [ERIC W. DOLAN](#) — March 28, 2018

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Athletes who are better at controlling their emotions tend to have better performance, suggests new research published in the journal [Personality and Individual Differences](#). The study found that emotional intelligence was linked to better times in a half-marathon race.

"My co-authors and I are all interested in how emotions influence human behavior, although we look at this question from different points of view," said Enrico Rubaltelli, an assistant professor of cognitive psychology at the University of Padova and corresponding author of the study.

"We have published several studies on how emotional intelligence influence decision-making in different fields, like finance, cheating, creativity, risk perception, and development. Furthermore, we all love to practice sports and are [starting a sport](#)

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[psychology research lab](#). The ability to overcome fatigue while running is a fundamental question and we were convinced that it depended greatly on people's ability to manage their emotions."



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The researchers had 237 runners fill out a survey the day before they participated in a half-marathon race. The survey included the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, and also asked a number of questions about their physical training.

Rubaltelli and his colleagues found a positive association between emotional intelligence and run times. People with higher emotional intelligence tended to run faster during the half-marathon than people with lower emotional intelligence.

This was true even after controlling for the effects of physical training and the number of half marathons ran in the past.

"We studied amateur runners, therefore the results are definitely relevant to the average athlete," Rubaltelli told PsyPost. "The main takeaway is that a good performance does not depend just on physical training but entails the ability to manages one's emotions.

"Our results are consistent with literature showing that people with high emotional intelligence are more resilient than people with low emotional intelligence, therefore it is likely these findings can generalize to other context in which people experience stress and fatigue (e.g., working environments)."

The study, like all research, has some limitations.

"A first caveat is certainly the correlational nature of the study, although we controlled for several potential confounding factors, like training load and personal best time," Rubaltelli admitted. "We are currently running a series of lab studies in which we manipulate the feedback provided to the runners and assess whether the performance of high and low emotional intelligence athletes is differently impacted."

"Of course, open questions concern the generalizability of these findings to other distances such as the marathon and the some of the underlying psychological processes."

"Related to this work, we have also started a mental training protocol with the goal of helping athletes being more aware of their emotions and bodily self-awareness in order to allow them to understand and regulate how they feel during training and competition," Rubaltelli added. "The goal is to increase the ability to manage emotions and inhibit irrelevant stimuli even in people who have a low trait emotional intelligence. We collected preliminary data, but more work is needed on this front."

The study, "[Emotional intelligence impact on half marathon finish times](#)", was authored

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