

Nutrition Tips

Running as a form of sport and exercise has very particular nutritional requirements. To get the best in performance, endurance and recovery out of your body, you will need to be concentrating on not only what you eat but *when* you eat. Follow these nutrition tips to improve both your speed and stamina.

Healthy Eating

It goes without saying that once you start running your body will need extra fuel for the miles you are covering. You will be burning roughly an extra 100 calories for each mile that you run. Not only that, but your muscles will be needing extra protein to keep them operating efficiently. Here is a quick guide to the foods that you should be eating as a runner:

- **Complex carbohydrates** provide slow and steady fuel. Complex carbohydrates such as whole grains, whole breads and unrefined pastas, vegetables and potatoes will not produce the sharp blood sugar highs and lows, which can leave you feeling depleted before the end of your run.
- **Glucose drinks** consumed in the first 15 minutes after finishing your run will be best absorbed for muscles seeking fuel sources. The 15-minute time frame is important, as this is when your muscles can utilise it best.
- **Protein** is essential for both tendon and muscle repair. Proteins are also essential for regulating hormones. The more often you run and the further distance you cover, the more repair work there will be for your muscles. An easy guide to remember is that if you are running a great distance you will need up to 1.5 grams of protein for every kilogram that you weigh. So if you weigh 140 pounds, or 64 kilos, you will need about 96 grams of protein daily. Your protein should be high quality and preferably lean, such as chicken, tofu, eggs, nuts, or fish, if you are also trying to shed a few pounds. For those runners who do not have a weight problem, low fat protein will not be a concern.



- **Fats.** Monounsaturated fats such as olive oil, flax seed oil, canola oil, and avocados are the healthiest fats to consume. Monounsaturated fats have been linked to a decrease in heart disease and stroke, and are one of the basic ingredients of the Mediterranean Diet. It is healthier for a runner to obtain their fat calories from these sorts of fats and oils than from unhealthy options such as lard or deep-fried anything.

- **Balanced meals** for runners should comprise roughly 20 percent fats, 60 percent complex carbohydrates and 20 percent proteins. Ensure that you consume plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables. Fruit smoothies are also an excellent and quick source of nutrition. A good variety of colourful foods should almost make a vitamin pill unnecessary.



- **Water** consumption is essential for everyone, but even more so for the runner who is going to sweat more than average. A good rule of thumb is to aim for at least two litres, or eight cups, of water per day. Herbal teas, sports drinks and fruit juices can be counted as fluids, but caffeine and alcohol do not as these will dehydrate you. Water should be consumed evenly throughout the day to keep fluid levels up and your body evenly hydrated.



- **Vitamins and Minerals** will play an important factor in your running performance and endurance. Your extra energy requirements will also mean that you will need extra vitamins and minerals; ideally, these should be provided from a healthy and well balanced diet of fresh and whole foods. Bottled supplements will never replace a healthy and varied diet and should only ever be considered as an extra, not a necessity.



- **Drink your meal.** Commercial protein drinks, carb drinks and sports drinks can all be useful ways to stock up on fuel before a run. These are especially useful for the early morning runner who doesn't have time to eat breakfast and then wait to run. Drinking meals is also easier on some runner's digestions than a big meal right before a run.

Snacks

Once you start running on a regular basis you will notice that your base metabolism starts to run a bit faster, which means that you will be burning up more calories. This is great news for those who want to shed a few pounds. Those who don't need to lose any weight will need to eat a little extra. Nutritional snacks such as fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grain sandwiches, smoothies, nuts, eggs, yogurts, and protein or health-food bars can all help to alleviate the dreaded energy slump. Healthy snacks will also ensure that your muscles and liver are always ready for further exercise, and additionally, you will have sufficient energy to get through day-to-day activities. Smaller meals more often will also keep your blood sugar levels more steady and your metabolism running high. Aim for three smaller meals, and two to three snacks throughout the course of the day.

Planning

The timing of your meals will be crucial to the success of your running performance. Not enough fuel and the tank will run out. Too much fuel too soon can be just as disastrous as not enough. The ideal formula for peak performance is to eat a meal rich in complex carbohydrates two to three hours prior to your run. After finishing your session it is a great idea to have a glucose drink within 15 minutes to replenish tired muscles looking for fuel. Eating a meal rich in protein and complex carbohydrates in the first two hours after your run will assist with muscle and tendon repair.

Counting Calories

As we have already said, the average person can burn about 100 calories for every mile they run. If you are unsure about how many calories you are burning you can always use a calorie burning counter to figure it out. These counters use factors such as your body

weight, age, fitness level, and gender, to approximately determine the calories you are burning up. Playing around with a calorie burning counter will demonstrate just how big a difference there can be in how many calories a runner can burn.

Pre-training Nutrition

As a generalisation, about one to two hours before your run you should aim for one to two cups of water plus 25 to 50 grams of carbs. Great choices are banana, porridge, bagel, wholegrain toast or an energy bar. Alternatively, use the water to combine with carb powder to make a drink.

Conclusion

As a rule, runners need to consume more calories than the non-runner. The consumption of good quality protein is vital for muscle repair, as is a steady supply of complex carbohydrates. Beware of empty calories that will only provide you with a sugar high and slump. Optimised running performances are dependent on consuming quality foods in a larger quantity, as well as careful timing of when you eat. **Finally and most importantly, enjoy your runs and enjoy your food!!**