

10 Things Every Runner Should Know About Nutrition

Dietitian Nathalie Jones explains the reasoning behind key nutritional facts that runners should be aware of...

1. Why we should eat within 2 hours of finishing our run

This is the time when our muscles are best able to replenish their carbohydrate stores (glycogen). We use up some of our glycogen as we run and, by eating some protein and carbohydrates together within 2 hours of finishing, we will optimise our energy and recovery for our next session.



2. Why carbohydrates are so important

Carbohydrates (pasta, rice, potatoes, cereal and bread) are our body's preferred source of fuel. That is to say that we are able to turn these kinds of foods into energy more easily than high fat or protein foods. We have much smaller reserves of carbohydrates, compared to protein and fat reserves, so carbohydrates at each meal is essential to keep them topped up!

3. Why porridge is such a good breakfast for runners

Porridge is the best breakfast or pre-run snack for runners. It provides good, long lasting energy in the form of low glycaemic index carbohydrate. Adding honey or some dried fruit will provide some quick carbohydrate energy too.



4. Why we should carry a sports drink with us for runs over 90 minutes

Dehydration and carbohydrate depletion are the main causes of fatigue in runners. By making sure we have an isotonic sports drink with us, we will be able to keep going at our pace for longer.

5. Why sugar is sometimes good for runners

Sugar is a type of carbohydrate that is quickly turned into energy. Too much of it in our diet can cause weight gain. However, for runners immediately before, or during running, it can provide a quick top up of energy and carbohydrates. Examples are sports drinks, jelly sweets and dextrose tablets.

6. Why a food and training diary is useful

Although there is evidence based diet advice available, individuals will also find certain foods and times of eating that suit their running the best. Keeping a food and training diary for a week can help you identify the types and timings of meals and snacks which improve sessions.



7. Why alcohol hinders our running

Apart from the obvious hangover, alcohol also dehydrates us and prevents us from breaking down energy stores into usable energy. This results in dehydration and low blood sugar, making us unable to sweat enough to regulate our body temperature and feel weak. The end result is an exhausting, un-enjoyable run!

8. Why we need a fuel boost on a longer run

By 18 miles, most runners' carbohydrate stores are totally depleted. This is when we 'hit the wall', feeling exhausted as though we can't think, run or do anything! The way to delay this happening, is to take on regular carbohydrates in the form of energy drinks, gels or sweets at regular intervals. It is recommended that you start taking this extra carbohydrate early on in a race and not to wait until you feel exhausted.

9. Why fruit and vegetables is good for our running

Fruit and vegetables contain vitamins called anti-oxidants. Their role is to mop up free radicals which are produced during chemical reactions in our bodies. When we exercise, these are produced in higher amounts. As free radicals are linked with poor health, ageing and cardio-vascular disease, it is another reason for having 5 fruit and vegetables per day.



10. Why we should have lean protein daily

Protein makes up part of our muscles and immune system. Most people have more than enough protein in their diet, but certain types of protein are of particular benefit to runners. The iron in red meat is more easily absorbed than in other foods and can help prevent anaemia, especially in female long distance runners, where anaemia is common. Oily fish and the soluble fibre in beans and pulses also help to reduce our cholesterol and therefore improve our heart health.

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