

## Get A Race Day Boost

All runners are looking for a boost on race day - whether it is to attain that elusive PB or just to 'get round'. Dietitian Nathalie Jones has some top tips to crank up those energy levels...

### Start with a full tank

- From 'just having a good breakfast', to 'carbo-loading', the basis of pre-run advice is the same, and that is to start with your tank of glycogen (your carbohydrate stores in your liver and muscles), full.
- Carbohydrates are your body's preferred energy fuel and so form the basis of your pre-race nutrition. However, the amount you need depends on the distance you are running. Unless you are running a half marathon or further, a decent dinner the night before containing about three handful sized portions of carbohydrate (pasta, rice, potatoes, bread or cereal) and a few handfuls of carbohydrate at breakfast, will be sufficient to fuel you through the race. If you don't like running after breakfast, have a carbohydrate rich supper such as a bowl of porridge or 2-3 slices of toast before you go to bed and an isotonic energy drink on race day morning.
- For runs of half marathon distance plus, you will probably be tapering your training prior to the race. By eating the same amount of carbohydrate during this time, your glycogen stores will naturally be topped up. If you do not taper, it is important to have some carbohydrate at each meal as well as carbohydrate snacks mid morning, mid afternoon and before bed, on the days leading up to the race.



### Top up your energy

- If you are a faster, more experienced runner, you probably do not need to carry extra energy on races under 10 miles. If however, you will be running for more than 80 minutes, you may benefit from taking on some carbohydrate around the half way mark. The key is to top up with extra carbohydrate early, so that you delay feeling weak, dizzy or need to slow your pace.
- Various products have been made for this purpose (basically to avoid you having to drag round bowls of pasta with you!). There are isotonic energy drinks, gels and bars and the choice is entirely yours as to which suits you best. Try them out on your long training runs.
- Gels tend to be lightest and can fit up your sleeve for example for easy access. However they can be messy if you don't use a whole one up in one go and some runners find that they are too concentrated and make them feel sick or need to go to the toilet (the common 'runners trots').
- Bars are less messy, will give you good energy and may suit slower runners or those who plan to walk some of the way. Isotonic energy drinks offer the ideal balance of carbohydrate and fluid to help you hydrate while topping up your energy and they are least likely to cause diarrhoea. It does mean carrying round a bottle with you so you may like to decant it into a smaller, 'kids' bottles or give to someone to pass to you on route. On most marathons (and larger half marathons), these drinks are provided for you.
- Other runners swear by jelly babies, tablet or dextrose tablets, all of which will offer carbohydrate but no fluid. They are easier to carry but, again, try beforehand and work out how many to take at one time and how often you need them.



### Make sure you are well hydrated

- Being even slightly dehydrated can lead to cramps, headaches and struggling more than usual during a race. Make sure that you are well hydrated in the days leading up to the race. About 2 litres of fluid (including water, tea, coffee etc) per day will be fine, unless it is particularly hot. You will know that you are hydrated enough if your urine is a pale straw colour.
- From when you wake up, sip about 400-600ml of fluids until half an hour before the race. By drinking slowly, you will be able to absorb the fluid more easily.
- On shorter races of 10k or under, you are unlikely to need extra fluid unless it is very warm. For races over 80 minutes, taking water on board early will help delay fatigue. Plan this in advance and decide whether to make use of the water stops or to carry water with you. You may want to carry sports drinks which will have the added benefit of containing energy and electrolytes.



### Carrying it all? Decide on your method

- Just holding your snack or drink in your hand works for some but it can give you a stitch as you tense up on that side. Arm bands and belts are popular and some runners even stuff gels or bars up their sleeves. Check out what your race offers in the way of water and energy drinks.



### Don't try anything new on race day

- Hopefully you are not reading this the night before your race but, if you are, you are probably better off doing your usual pre-race routine as opposed to trying some of these new tips. Save this knowledge for future races, once you have tried out some of the suggestions and worked out what works for you.
- Find out if there is a particular brand of drink being offered during the race and try it beforehand on a training run. Remember that one runner's much loved energy drink is a recipe for disaster for another with sensitive bowels!



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