

Fuel yourself to go the distance

Anita Bean explains how to ace your endurance race nutrition

MEET THE EXPERT

Anita Bean is an award-winning nutritionist, author and athlete. Her no-nonsense approach to fuelling is typified by the use of actual food rather than relying on 'sports nutrition' products.

Whether you're training for the London Marathon or a summertime ultra, now is the time to get your nutrition on track. A good fuelling plan is crucial if you want to make gains in your endurance, stay illness-free and run to your full potential in the event. Firstly, it's important to say there's no single diet that suits every runner – everyone has different needs – but there are a few general guidelines that

will help support your training and allow you to recover more efficiently. First and foremost, as you build your weekly mileage you'll need to consume more energy (or calories) – a lot more! During running, you're burning 500-800 kcal/h, depending on your pace. If you fail to eat enough day after day, you'll experience muscle loss, fatigue and poor performance. On the other hand, running is not a licence to eat all the cakes! You still need to match your energy intake and energy output. If you over-eat day

after day you'll gain weight and that will slow down your running, resulting in sub-optimal performance.

Secondly, you'll need more carbohydrate. Although you burn a mixture of fat and carbs, carbs are your muscles' preferred fuel source and are essential for fast running or getting up hills. As a rule of thumb, the more muscle you have and the longer and harder you train, the more carbs you need. But, again, you need the right amount for your workout – not too little, not too much. Running consistently with low carb (glycogen) stores will reduce your capacity for high-intensity efforts, cause early fatigue, reduce your endurance, and lower your immunity.

This can result in slow recovery and increase your illness risk. But there's no one size that fits all; adjust carbs to your training requirements and preferences.

Thirdly, make sure you eat enough protein to promote muscle recovery and repair after running. Runners generally need more protein than the average person – between 1.2 and 2g per kg body weight per day or in the region of 20g (or 0.25g/ kg of body weight) of protein per meal. You can obtain this from one small chicken breast, three eggs or 500ml of milk but there are also plenty of plant-based protein sources: beans, lentils, chickpeas, peas, tofu, whole grains, quinoa, nuts and seeds are great options.

→ TURN THE PAGE FOR ANITA'S RACE PLAN

AT-A-GLANCE

Time to play your carbs right

To give you an example, if you weigh 70kg and run for about an hour, you'll need approximately 350g carbs/day, which looks something like this:



BREAKFAST
1 large bowl porridge (75g oats) + banana + nuts



SNACK
1 handful nuts + seeds



LUNCH
1 baked potato (200g) + tuna or cheese + salad + fruit



SNACK
1 flapjack or fruit and nut bar + 500ml milk



DINNER
1 bowl pasta (75g), grilled chicken or beans, veg



DESSERT
1 yogurt + fruit

RUNFESTRUN

If you fancy putting all this great advice into practice why not enter RunFestRun which takes place in Windsor Great Park over the weekend of May 22-24. There you can run a half marathon, 2.5k, 10k and 5k not to mention a relay on the Sunday to really test out your endurance!
runfestrun.co.uk

Pre-run fuelling

It's generally beneficial to eat before a run – this will provide you with energy to help sustain your pace. For midday or evening runs, have a meal two to four hours beforehand: a combination of carbohydrate and protein produces sustained energy release. For example, porridge, a falafel wrap or a simple rice dish with fish or beans would be ideal. For early morning runs, you may prefer running on an empty stomach, which is fine if you're doing a slow steady run

or a session lasting less than an hour. Anything more than this, however, and you'll certainly benefit from fuelling before or during the run.

How to carb load

The old strategy of glycogen depletion before carbohydrate loading is no longer recommended. The newer protocol practised by elite endurance runners comprises a gradual reduction in training volume over the final three

weeks before the marathon together with an increase in carbohydrate intake for the final two days – think porridge, potatoes, rice, bananas or pasta. Eat little and often; avoid eating too late in the day or over-stuffing! Stick to what you're used to – eat nothing new on race day – but plan to eat breakfast three to four hours before the start of the race. Porridge with bananas, granola with yogurt, or eggs on toast are all suitable.

WELL GEL



For all the onus we like to place on eating real food to fuel your runs, it's undeniable that – for reasons of portability and ease of consumption – dedicated sports nutrition products such as gels and energy bars do have their place in a trail runner's pockets.

Mid-run fuelling

If you're running for longer than 60-90 minutes, extra carbs will help you maintain your pace longer and delay fatigue. Begin fuelling after 45-60 minutes then plan to refuel at regular intervals, say every 15-30 minutes. Here are some examples of what to take with you for long runs. Each supplies 30g of carbohydrate:

- 2 bananas
- 2 x 30ml energy gels
- 40g raisins or 2 Medjool dates
- 6 jelly babies or 4 energy chews
- 1 fruit and nut bar, oat bar or energy bar
- 500ml isotonic sports drink

For long runs or races, it's a good idea to take savoury as well as sweet

options to reduce flavour fatigue and reduce the risk of tooth damage. Try peanut butter or cheese sandwiches and wraps, crackers, rice cakes, cheese and nuts.

Avoiding gut problems

Develop your own fuel plan and try different foods and drinks to see what helps. Everyone's different so you will need to experiment. It may feel uncomfortable initially, and gut problems (such as the dreaded 'runner's trots') are common. However, the gut can adapt and it's possible to train it. Start with small amounts, such as one bite of banana, then increase gradually the amount and frequency so your gut becomes better at digesting and absorbing food while running.

Aim to do two or three long runs using the same fuelling schedule you plan to use during your race. You also need to practice the art of drinking from a cup while running and train your stomach to handle food and drinks without getting upset.

Hydration

Hydrate before you run – checking the colour of your urine is the simplest and most practical way to assess hydration. Aim for a pale straw colour, anything darker suggests underhydration and that you need to drink more. There are no strict rules on how much to drink during training or racing – everyone is different! Current advice is to drink to thirst, not ahead of thirst.

Post-run fuelling

Recovery is an important part of your training programme. What you eat and drink in the hours following your run is critical when it comes to improving your endurance. For speedy recovery, remember the 3Rs...

Rehydrate: replace each 500g weight loss with 450-675ml fluid

Refuel: you'll need to replenish glycogen stores, ideally 1g carb/kg body weight. Refuelling is faster than normal during the first two hours so make use of this if you train twice a

day. However, if you train once a day then simply ensure you consume enough carbs over 24 hours.

Rebuild: to promote muscle repair, include protein in your recovery meal (15-25g is ideal). Examples of drinks and snacks that supply 20g include 500ml milk (dairy or soya), 200g strained Greek yogurt or a hummus and avocado sandwich.

In summary

A well-rehearsed nutrition and hydration plan will make your training

easier and more enjoyable and give you the best chance of putting in a great performance on race day. Make sure you match your food intake to your energy output, adjust carbs to your training requirements and personal preferences and eat enough protein after each run to promote proper recovery. Mid-run fuelling can be tricky so experiment with different fuelling options to see what works for you and dedicate a few long runs to rehearsing the race schedule you plan to use.

