

Crown Heights Running Club

Marathon Nutrition Tips: Fuel Your Way to the Finish Line

What's your starting point? What's your typical meal pattern? Ask yourself what, how much, when and where you eat. How long does it typically take you to eat? What can you improve upon? What do you do well? How's your energy level most days?

Map out your marathon-training schedule. Figure out what adjustments you'll need to make to your eating habits or meal pattern to accommodate the marathon-training schedule.

Think of food as fuel. Keep a marathon training grocery list. You'll consistently need fruits, vegetables, carbohydrates, lean proteins (chicken, turkey, fish, tofu, tempeh, nuts, seeds, legumes, beans, dairy) and healthful fats (nuts, seeds, nut butters, avocados, flax, extra virgin olive, cold pressed canola and/or coconut oil). If you eat out often, find restaurants that can provide the right fuel.

Find the right balance of calories. Be mindful of overall calories. You'll likely require more calories than usual, however, the "eating whatever and whenever because I'm running a marathon" mentality can easily pile on unwanted pounds. On a light workout day or off day, adjust your portions, especially your carbohydrate intake. Less active, less carbs.

Don't avoid carbs on active days! Carbohydrates are the main fuel source for the active body and help you be more efficient during your workouts. About 55-65% of your calories should come from carbohydrates. Low-glycemic index foods such as oatmeal, quinoa, bulgur, farro, brown rice, whole wheat pasta, high fiber bread, bran cereal and lentil/bean-based soups are best 3-4 hours before a long run because they generally take longer to digest and provide sustained energy and fiber. High-glycemic index foods such as bread, white potatoes, white rice, crackers, gels/chews, pretzels, and pasta quickly raise blood sugar levels and are appropriate for recovery foods immediately following a long run or intense workout (or during) so depleted muscles can refuel quickly. At mealtimes, try to focus on higher fiber carbohydrates as they are more nutrient-dense and better for overall health.

During the marathon, you'll need carbs and fluids. Part of your marathon training will be to train your stomach to adjust to taking in carbohydrates and fluids on the go. This is very individual. The amount you'll consume depends on how long you're out there but generally between **30-60 grams of carb per hour** is the goal. There are different choices to reach that goal: sports drink, gels, chews, sport beans, food (pretzels, bananas, applesauce, jelly

beans, Swedish fish, cookies). You'll need to experiment with the right choice and timing that works best for you.

On the course: Most major marathons have hydration stations between mile 2 to mile 25, some as often as each mile and occasionally on both sides of the road. For example, at the Boston Marathon, each mile hydration station will have the first four tables of Lemon-Lime Gatorade Endurance Formula (21 grams of carb for 12 ounces), and the remaining tables will have Poland Spring water. The average cup along the course holds 4 ounces of fluid. There is a PowerGel station at mile 17. You can find out the specific hydration and nutrition details for race day on your marathon's specific website. If the info isn't listed, email the contact person or help section provided on the site.

Choose plenty of protein. Protein helps with repair of muscle tissue. Protein takes longer to digest than carbohydrates. Be mindful that it may be tougher to tolerate protein foods right before exercise so choose protein foods a few hours before your long run and again at your mealtimes.

Find healthful fats. A small amount of healthful fat goes a long way to help with fullness and satisfaction. Avoiding fat will likely affect your immune system making you more susceptible to getting sick. Try to include some healthful fat at each meal and for your snacks.

Consider a Vitamin D supplement of 1000-2000 IU/day. Vitamin D is difficult to get in adequate amounts through food so it makes sense to supplement. You'll still need to eat well and get plenty of rest to optimize your immune system and your overall marathon experience.

Hydrate but avoid over hydrating. Drinking adequate fluids is important. A quick way to determine your hydration status is to look at the color of your pee (it should be trending clear). The American College of Sports Medicine recommends 4-8 ounces of fluid every 15-20 minutes of hard running. For runs less than an hour, water is fine. For runs over an hour, choose a sports drink. Sports drinks provide carbohydrates to fuel both your mind and muscles, sodium to enhance water absorption and water to replace any losses from sweat. If your stomach is upset during a long run or race, diluting the sports drink with water may help you tolerate it better. Also, at a minimum, just swishing sports drink around in your mouth (and spitting it out) might provide a mental benefit. Carrying salt tabs or a little bag of sea salt crystals to take a wet fingertip-ful every few miles (or add to water or sports drink) can help maintain your sodium levels on very hot days. Experiment first!

Meal Timing. Some marathoners find it useful to eat smaller meals more frequently throughout the day with fluids in-between. Others like to stick to three meals. The larger the meal, the longer you'll need to digest (3-4 hours for a large meal). This is very individual but keeping healthful portable snacks as a backup plan is always a great idea (ex., apple and pumpkin seeds or almonds). Keep it simple and familiar.

Know Before You Go. Know the start time. Know the hotel location. Does the hotel have a small kitchen or refrigerator? Where is the closest grocery store? What restaurants are nearby? How will you get to the start? Remember, the start time may vary from your typical training run schedule (and, it might take some time to cross the actual starting line). This may be an adjustment to your normal meal planning/training schedule. *Always experiment before the big day.*

--Practice, Practice, Practice. Experiment with various hydration and fueling strategies during your long training runs. By the time you reach the starting line, you should have your plan committed to memory. Be flexible but you should have a 'best-case scenario' plan in mind.

HAVE FUN!!!

A few resources:

Runner's World Magazine and runnersworld.com

The New Rules of Marathon and Half-Marathon Nutrition by Matt Fitzgerald

80/20 Running: Run Stronger and Race Faster by Training Slower by Matt Fitzgerald

The Runners World Cookbook edited by Joanna Sayago Golub

Feed Zone Portables: A Cookbook of On-The-Go Food for Athletes by Biju Thomas & Allen Lim

Marathoning for Mortals. A Regular Person's Guide to the Joy of Running or Walking a Half-Marathon or Marathon by John "The Penguin" Bingham and Coach Jenny Hadfield, MA, CPT

Marathon: The Ultimate Training Guide by Hal Higdon

Marathon: You Can Do It! by Jeff Galloway

HOW MUCH CARBOHYDRATE?

to find kg, take body weight in lbs and divide by 2.2

Activity in minutes	Daily carbohydrate target
30-45	3-4 g/kg
46-60	4-5 g/kg
61-75	5-6 g/kg
76-90	6-7 g/kg
90	7-8 g/kg
>120	8-10 g/kg

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The New Rules of Marathon Nutrition & Racing Weight

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