

# Nutrition tips

As race day looms, you will hopefully have got into your stride with your training programme, but have you considered your nutrition strategy?

What we eat plays a vital role in our health and wellbeing, and nutrition has a significant impact on training and performance across all levels of sport. Elite athletes recognise that after natural talent and good training, eating well is a key element for enhancing training and performance. We may not all be elite athletes, but we can all benefit from fine tuning our diet. Eating well in the run up to the race will help you to get the most benefit from your training runs, aid recovery, reduce fatigue, help keep you in good health and importantly help you to get the maximum enjoyment on race day! See the top tips below to help support your training and some advice for race day itself.

## **Before training 'Make sure you have fuel in the tank'**

It is important to make sure you are well fuelled and properly hydrated before each training run so that you have sufficient fuel for your muscles. If you start a run poorly fuelled it increases the risk of early fatigue and poor performance.

The ideal time for a pre-training meal is two to four hours before your run and should be based on carbohydrate rich foods such as bread, rice, potatoes or pasta along with some protein, for example chicken, fish, cheese, eggs, beans, lentils or nuts. Try to keep the amount of fat to a minimum as this slows down the absorption of food and can make you feel sluggish and slow or cause unpleasant discomfort when running. However, balancing a busy work and home life or going for an early morning run can make following this advice tricky. If you are pushed for time, eating a pre-training snack and having a drink 30 minutes before your run will help. Again, this snack should be high in carbohydrate and low in fat. Ideas for a pre-training snack include a banana and a yoghurt, a couple of slices of toast with honey, a low-fat milkshake, a bowl of cereal and low-fat milk or a cereal bar.

Remember we are all different and some people can happily run shortly after eating a meal, whereas others will experience severe discomfort. Use your training to work out what works best for you so that can time your eating for race day.

## After training 'Refuel'

Eating and drinking after your training run is important in order to replenish your muscle energy stores, to help your muscles recover and to rehydrate. Ideally you should eat a recovery snack or meal soon after finishing your run. There is a two-hour window of opportunity post-exercise when our bodies are particularly efficient at absorbing carbohydrate and storing it in the muscles where it is used as fuel.

As well as eating a carbohydrate-containing meal or snack, it is sensible to include some protein as this has been shown to help reduce muscle damage and muscle soreness and promote muscle repair. Eating carbohydrate-based food in conjunction with protein-rich foods also has been shown to be the most effective way of replacing muscle energy stores. The ideal ratio of carbohydrate to protein is 4:1.

The good news is that this does not mean you have to buy special sports nutrition recovery drinks, normal flavoured milks or just plain milk contains the right combination of carbohydrates and protein to help your body refuel and recover and has been shown to be as effective as specific sports drinks. As an alternative to milk, or milk-based drinks you could also eat a cheese/chicken/tuna sandwich, have peanut butter on toast or dried fruit and nuts.

Don't forget to rehydrate, again special products are not necessary and water is fine. The easiest way to check your hydration level is to look at the colour of your urine - it should be a pale straw colour, any darker than this indicates that you may be dehydrated. It is better to sip small amounts frequently rather than drinking a large volume in one go as it takes 15-30 minutes for fluid to be absorbed.



## Countdown to Race Day

In the few days running up to the run stick with your normal diet, now is not the time to try anything new or unfamiliar. Make sure you include carbohydrate-rich foods such as pasta and rice but there is no need to go overboard and eat vast quantities of carbs. Make sure you don't skip meals and aim to keep well hydrated.

The day before the race your focus should be on ensuring your energy stores are fully topped up and you are well hydrated. In practice this means avoiding strenuous exercise and eating carbohydrate-rich foods at each mealtime.

The pre-race pasta party is a great opportunity for you to get together with other Jamie's Farm runners and top up your energy stores ready for the big day. Just try and avoid overindulging as eating too much the night before may make you feel heavy and sluggish the next day.

## Race Day!

You will have hopefully worked out your preferred pre-run meal whilst training and you should stick with what works for you. Do not try anything new! You should eat a carbohydrate-rich meal 2-4 hours before the race so that there is time for it to be digested before you start running. Eating well in the days leading up to the race will already have ensured that your energy stores are full and the pre-race meal will replace any energy used since the last meal and help prevent hunger pangs and (believe it or not!) help leave your tummy feeling settled and comfortable.

Pre-race jitters may cause some people to lose their appetite, but it is still important to eat something beforehand. Bland foods such as porridge or rice cakes, or liquid meals such as flavoured milk or yoghurt drinks may be easier to consume- but remember to try these foods before race day to ensure that they agree with you. You may wish to eat a small snack, such as a banana, dried fruit, or cereal bar enroute to the event. Don't forget to keep sipping water 'little and often'- you want to start the race well hydrated.

What you do after the race is also very important. Make sure you have a recovery-snack ready for after the run and you take on-board sufficient fluids to rehydrate- this will mean ensuring you drink small amounts of fluid throughout the rest of the day. Ideally you should hold off on the alcohol until you are fully hydrated.