

Common Nutrition issues For Marathon Training

The following are tips to supplement your diet during marathon training, and for race day preparation.

Recovery and Carbohydrate

Carbohydrate provides energy to your muscles. Following a long run (>45 min) your muscle carbohydrate stores will be depleted, the extent to which is dependent on the intensity that you run at. When stores are substantially depleted fatigue occurs. In order to prevent a gradual process of failing to restore your carbohydrate stores in between training sessions, have a high carbohydrate snack after your run and aim to eat a proper meal within 2 hours. This will ensure that you meet your carbohydrate needs before the next training session.

Snack suggestions:

1. Two low fat biscuits, a low fat yoghurt/custard/rice pudding and a glass of fruit juice (200ml – 400ml)
2. A sandwich with a low fat filling (ham, tuna, chicken, low fat cheese) and a glass of fruit juice/squash (200 ml – 400 ml).
3. Two pieces of bread with 10-15g of jam and a glass of milk (200 ml -400 ml).
4. A cereal bar and a glass of fruit juice (200ml – 400ml)
5. Two cereal bars



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- 3.
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Low Body fat Levels

Having a low body fat level is an advantage when you have to carry your body weight over many miles. It would be helpful to have your body composition assessed to enable you to set sensible goals in line with good health as well as performance.

Gastrointestinal problems

During hard runs many runners experience gastrointestinal problems. Symptoms include suffering stomach cramps, diarrhoea or wind, burping, heart burn. The cause is unknown but it is thought to be related to the intensity of the running, stress of competition, and perhaps dehydration or over hydration. Sometimes you will be able to pinpoint certain foods that cause the problems, but it is also good to play around with the type and timing of foods before running. Often it suits to run on an empty stomach, with the pre-race meal eaten far in advance. Also, liquid meal supplements provide an easily digestible low bulk pre-exercise meal, they are also handy post exercise when you may not be able to stomach a meal.

Liquid meal suggestion:

- 300ml skimmed milk with 4 teaspoons milkshake powder.
- 300ml skimmed milk with 150g very low fat fruit yoghurt
- 300ml skimmed milk with 100g low fat fromage frais
- 300ml skimmed milk with tablespoon skimmed milk powder

Pre-event meal

The pre-event meal is your last opportunity to top up your body's carbohydrate stores so it should never be skipped. A light snack such as the ones below are ideal.



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1. Two bagels, large banana, and a bottle of sports drink
2. A big bowl of cereal with milk and a large banana.
3. A jacket potato with beans and 1-2 glasses of fruit juice.
4. A medium sized plate of pasta with a tomato based sauce, vegetables and low fat meat (or soy).
5. 4 pieces of bread with jam and 1-2 glasses of fruit juice.

Fluid and Fuel during the event

Aim to drink about 500ml in the hour leading up to the start of the race – leaving enough time to go to the toilet. In a half marathon you may find that if the climate is cool and your predicted race time is around an hour, you will not need to take on fuel or water during the race. However, if your prospective time is more than this it is advisable to make use of the drinks stations on the way. Drink 2 or 3 large mouthfuls of sports drink every 30- 40mins. If only water is available, be careful not to gulp too much down as it is not an ideal source of hydration during exercise. It may leave you feeling uncomfortable or needing to urinate. It may also be wise to take an energy gel sachet with you to supplement the water.

Sports Drinks can be quite expensive. Follow the recipe below to make your own to use during training:

The amounts shown are sufficient for 1 litre (1000 mL) of drink.

- 50 grams of glucose as dextrose monohydrate (available from most chemists).
- 0.5 grams of sodium chloride (table salt). This is equivalent to about 1/7th of a level teaspoon.
- 1.5 grams of sodium bicarbonate (baking soda). This is equivalent to about half of a level teaspoon.
- Add the above ingredients to 500 mL of water from the cold tap. Mix thoroughly until completely dissolved.
- Add 100mL of a commercially available sugar-free (low-cal) fruit cordial (experiment with different flavours to see what you like best). A citrus fruit flavour such as lemon or lime is a popular choice. Buy supermarket own brands to keep the cost low.
- Finally add more cold water to top up to a total volume of 1 litre.

If you find the drink to be a little too salty for your taste, then instead of the table salt and baking soda, add 2.5 grams (about one level teaspoon) of sodium citrate (as trisodium citrate dihydrate). This will provide a similar amount of sodium, but without the salty taste.

Pour the drink into a bottle that can be kept airtight. Store it in the fridge if you are not going to use it on the same day. Use within 3 days.