

Eating for Race Day

Whether you are running to compete or running for fun, you want to be able to perform your best on race day. A key aspect of running for a personal record is the type of fuel you give your body before, during, and after the race. Imagine your body as a machine, it requires the right type of fuel to perform smoothly. If you place the wrong type of fuel in the machine it can experience problems and perform poorly.

The first aspect you must consider is the timing of your meal before the race. If you eat too close to the race it can create problems such as cramping, heartburn, or digestive trouble. Your body will also focus on breaking down the meal you just ate rather than focusing on the race you are running. However, it isn't a good idea to skip the pre-race meal either, or you may be left in the dust suffering from fatigue and dizziness. The golden window for a pre-race meal is 2 to 3 hours prior to the race. If you don't want to get up early enough for that type of meal, you can always wake up, eat, and go back to sleep. Shorter races don't require as much input as longer races. Therefore, you want to aim to eat between 150-200 calories for a 5k and 500 calories or more for longer races, like marathons.



What should you eat before the race? You want to stay away from a pre-race meal consisting of protein and fat, which are harder to digest and convert into usable energy. You also want to stay away from a high fiber meal as well since it could lead to GI distress. If you plan to "carb load" before a race it is best to eat your largest meal two nights before the race rather than the night before. That way if anxiety or any other issue causes problems with the digestion of that meal you won't have to pay the consequences during your run. As for the morning of meal, you want to aim for an easy-to-digest, carb-based food such as toast with jam or a plain bagel with honey.

Hydration can make or break a runner, especially if you are running for a PR. You want to make sure you drink enough to hydrate, but not so much that it leads to hyponatremia. Hyponatremia is a dangerous condition that occurs when someone drinks too much water and doesn't take in enough electrolytes. Most of your fluid intake should take place 90 minutes prior to the race (16 to 24 ounces) and you should take in a final 6 to 8 ounces before the start of the race. If it is a warmer day, count on consuming more. Use your urine color as a guide for your hydration level. A light yellow color is best.

Aid stations are placed in races for a specific reason: to help you out! Take advantage of the water and nutrition they offer. You want to try and take in some sort of liquid every 2 to 3 miles. If the race will last longer than 60 minutes you need to plan on taking in at least 30 to 60 grams of carbs every hour after the first hour of running as well. You need to discover what your body likes during training for this "on-the-go nutrition". Not everyone is a GU person. A GU is a type of nutritious snack that endurance athletes use to maintain energy throughout an event. Decide what you like while training and make sure it is available on race day even if you have to bring it with you.

Many people finish the race and make a beeline straight to the beer tent. Although this may be a way you reward yourself for your hard work, remember that your body needs nourishment first. The beer should follow some type of food and non-alcoholic beverage, preferably water. All of those freebies at the end of the race are there for a reason so take advantage of it all. Once you have allowed your body to take in what it needs to replenish glycogen stores/hydrate, then you can indulge yourself.

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