



How to Eat to Run: Fueling the Body for Performance

by [Jason Fitzgerald](#)
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High-carb, low-carb, clean eating, Paleo, vegan – when did eating become so complicated?

No matter your particular diet, as a runner, your goal is to fuel your body to optimize your training and racing.

As a runner, it's essential to remember that *food is your fuel*. While many runners struggle with their relationship with food, calories or [weight loss](#), the bottom line is that you can't run well if you don't fuel properly.

Generally speaking, fueling to run involves following some basic guidelines without getting overly concerned about every single thing that you put in your mouth. You don't have to be an obsessive calorie counter or follow a rigid fueling plan to succeed!

6 STRATEGIES FOR FUELING YOUR RUNNING

1. LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

Learning to feed your body as an athlete means learning to eat when you're hungry and knowing how to push away when you're full. It's a simple concept that's difficult in practice because many of us often ignore our body's signals. Try to tune in more closely and trust your instincts. It will take some time, but you can get back to fueling yourself more instinctively.

2. THINK ABOUT MACRONUTRIENTS FIRST

As an athlete, every meal should include the [three macronutrients](#): protein, healthy fat and a high-quality carbohydrate. Composing a meal this way will help increase satiety. Fat is certainly not the enemy it was once considered to be, and adding healthy fats like nuts or avocado to your meals will help you feel fuller longer.

3. EAT REAL FOOD

Even Paleo and vegan eaters agree that when it comes to eating healthfully, you are always better off sticking to real food. This means food that is minimally processed and as close to its original, whole form as possible. Think: vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts and seeds, and fish and lean meat. At the grocery store, these items are typically found in the periphery of the market, rather than in the middle aisles.

4. EAT LIKE THE ELITES



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“The dietary habits and training methods of the world’s best endurance athletes define what works,” says Matt Fitzgerald, a runner and author. “These athletes hold most of the records, they win most of the big races and they eat a lot of carbohydrates. We need no other proof that a high-carbohydrate diet is good for hard-training endurance athletes.”

Carbohydrates are a necessity for runners to replenish glycogen stores and fuel faster workouts, so don’t skimp! Although there are certainly exceptions, if you look at top-tier runners, they are regularly consuming carbohydrates. Not all carbs are created equal, of course, so that doesn’t mean it’s OK to go for that sugar-laden donut.

5. PLAN YOUR FUEL BEFORE AND DURING RUNS

Planning for a race or workout is the only time it becomes beneficial to consider your nutrition more systematically. Take your current body weight, and divide it by 4 to calculate the approximate amount of carbohydrate grams per hour you’ll need during races or long training runs.

Experiment with a variety of fuel sources, and learn what works best for your digestive tract, especially for runs longer than 90 minutes. As a general rule, plan to fuel approximately every 30 minutes for runs this length or longer.

6. DON’T BE A PERFECTIONIST

Strive to eat as well as you can 80–90% of the time, but allow yourself to find pleasure in your food. A few cookies or a slice of cake are not going to derail your diet if you allow yourself to enjoy it while also balancing them with quality, nutritionally dense food.

As a runner, you have more specific nutritional requirements than the general population. Follow these guidelines, and you’ll be well on your way to navigating the complicated world of athlete nutrition.