

The Essentials of Running

FOOTWEAR: Buy your training shoes from a running specialty store where the staff is trained specifically to work with runners. Specialty stores will put you in the shoe that fits your feet the best, thus avoiding discomfort or injury. These stores may cost marginally a bit more, but in the long run you will save a lot on orthotics and other medical expenses. There are just two specialty running stores in our immediate vicinity, Fleet Feet Sports in Winston-Salem and By Foot Sports in King.

WATCH: All runners should have a watch with a stop watch function for practices. A GPS watch is recommended but not required. There are many low end quality GPS watches that would work great for the high school runner. Most sports stores or running stores can help guide you through the GPS watches to find your fit.

BLOODWORK: Iron deficiency is a fairly common occurrence among distance runners, especially females. Iron deficiency can lead to a drop in running performance, delayed recovery and increased fatigue. Getting your iron checked is very simple, yet new to many runners. It is essential to get blood work done at the beginning of the season as well as once during mid/late season (make sure you request a test for ferritin and hemoglobin). Low normal ranges of ferritin are in the 12 range for men and women. Runners should have levels higher than normal. You should speak with your doctor if you think you need an iron supplement.

NUTRITION: You will eventually be running quite a bit and require plenty of food for recovery. However, focus on eating the right foods and drinking the right drinks before the season starts. Try and have a balanced diet, consume fruits, veggies, carbs, and proteins. Your food is your fuel! You'll need 3 meals a day and healthy snacks to refuel your body and prepare you for practices and races. Remember, some foods are fine in moderation, but if you want to be successful, do everything that is in your power to not eat foods that do not benefit your body.

MULTIVITAMINS: A multivitamin with iron is recommended for all runners, but it is especially important for female runners. Any shortcomings in diet can be caught with a good multivitamin and this can also help keep those iron levels up.

HYDRATION: Drink water consistently throughout the day. Staying hydrated throughout the day will help you during those humid mornings and hot afternoon practices. Waiting to hydrate at practice is too late. You won't have enough time to properly process the fluids for any true benefit. Avoid sugary drinks and carbonated/caffeinated beverages. Also, do not sip on Gatorade throughout the day. Sports drinks like this are for recovery, so only use them after your hard workouts or races.

RECOVERY: Recovery is very important in running and nothing aids recovery more than your diet and sleep. Sleep is crucial not only in duration, but in its timing and consistency. Try and get at least 8 consecutive hours of sleep per day, and avoid staying up past midnight at all costs. Your body will not ever 'catch up' on sleep. Plan your evenings to make sure you are getting consistent sleep every day.

TRAINING LOGS: Keeping track of your mileage is very important. By filling out a running log, an athlete truly helps their possibility of consistent performance and improvement.

DISCIPLINE: Being a successful runner requires self-discipline. Make yourself do the tough things to help yourself become a better runner.