

Finished From the Start

Prepare your body nutritionally!

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Most people get so wrapped up in prerace training and exercise that they forget about focusing on nutrition until the last minute. However, if you're going to train like an athlete, you'll also need to eat like an athlete. So just as you'd map out your plan to build up to running 26 miles, you should also map out your plan to stay satiated and energized for the duration of the race.

With that said, here are three nutritional keys to remember in order to avoid hitting the wall during your next endurance event.

Stay Hydrated: There's a fine line between H₂O and H₂-Oh No! Too much water and you'll feel bloated and nauseous, not enough and you'll cramp up, crash and burn. So how much is enough? Well, that varies for each person so you're going to need to conduct a few experiments to determine what your hydration needs are.

Your first test is a urine test...literally. Next time that you go to the bathroom, take a peak before you flush the toilet. I know, it's slightly gross but hey, this is for science right? Is the water crystal clear? If so, you're probably drinking enough. Does the water look like lemonade or any shade in between? If so, that probably means that you're dehydrated and will need to drink more.

For your second test, you'll need to weigh yourself before you begin your next long training session. Remember that number and then weigh yourself again after you're done working out. If you now weigh more, you're most likely drinking too much during your training sessions. Most people will weigh less however, due to sweat and energy expenditure.

When your body loses more than two percent of it's weight through intense activity, it causes the heart to work harder to move blood through your system which will definitely hinder your performance. So your goal is to start drinking enough during your workouts so that your weight is approximately the same when you finish. For a reference point, one pound is equivalent to approximately 24 ounces of liquid. On average you should aim to consume one cup of water for every 15 minutes of activity. Everyone's body responds differently however, which is why I set that runners time machine back at least 4 weeks. You don't want to experiment on the day of the race so these are the types of things that you'll want to test out through trial and error during your training.

Generally speaking, fresh water is best, however when exercising at a high level for more than 60-90 minutes under extreme endurance conditions; sodium, potassium and electrolytes are drained from the body. In these cases, switching to a bottled water or a sports drink that contains these elements is acceptable. For shorter or less intense workouts however, avoid sports drinks as many are filled with extra sugars and chemicals that serve no real purpose and may inhibit your overall progress.

Restock Your Stores: ...your glycogen stores that is. Without getting overly technical, glycogen is how the energy filled nutrients that are extracted from starches and carbohydrates are stored in your body. So much like gas to a car, if you provide your system with high quality fuel and keep your tank full, you'll be able to sustain a higher level of performance.

In general, whether you're running an event or not, try to eat every two to three hours for a total of 5 to 6 times. Your meals should be well

balanced with a mix of lean protein, a quality carbohydrate and either fruit with the earlier meals or vegetables in the evening.

As your training becomes more intense and the endurance event draws closer, you'll want to start increasing your carbohydrate intake to raise the level of stored glycogen in your system. So for the week or two leading up to the event you'll want to start consuming more pasta, brown rice and other quality carbohydrates to start filling your tank for race day. The key word here is "quality", so know that there is definitely a difference between a bowl of oatmeal and a bowl of Cap'n Crunch!

Your most important meal of the day is the one consumed immediately after your workout. When you train, you'll be tapping into that stored glycogen so it's important that you replace what you've lost immediately. For optimum recovery, a high quality liquid meal, ideally in the form of a protein shake, should be consumed within 30 minutes of exercise.

By replacing the glycogen you've lost immediately, you'll be able to use your next meal to continue filling your energy stores in preparation for the big day.

Keep it Simple on Race Day: If you've put in the work through training and eating properly throughout your preparation, most of your work has already been completed. However that now brings us back to the original question of what to eat on the day of the race to avoid crashing.

Everyone has a different tolerance threshold for various foods so you really should experiment with this during your training to figure out what works best for you. Generally speaking however, approximately 3 to 4 hours before the race most athletes have water, fruit, yogurt, cereal with milk, white bread, lean meats, regular bagels (either plain or with peanut butter) or even pasta for breakfast.

Bear in mind that the prerace nutrition for an endurance athlete is not something that should be followed all year under regular condition. This is why the whole grain versions were not mentioned for the breads for example. Whole grains, fibers and fats are things you'll probably want to avoid before a race, unless you plan on running with a roll of toilet paper in your hand and possibly making a few stops along the way!

Many of the same items can be consumed up to two hours before the race, but within an hour of the race you'll probably want to start shifting more toward fruit and an enhanced water or light sports drink. Again, experiment during your training so that you'll know what works best for you.

Sticking to these three key guidelines will help you burst through the finish line with energy to spare, no time machine necessary.



Darrell W. Butler has trained, managed and consulted for fitness centers and media outlets around the world. When he's not training a client or sharing his words of wisdom, you can catch him drinking a PFC Berries A'More Recovery Shake at his local gym's juice bar! For more information visit the Darrell Butler Personal Training website at www.dbptonline.com

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