

Eating During Exercise

Athlete Scenario

During marathons, I perform well at the beginning but struggle toward the end. I use sports drinks and energy gels, but after about 2 hours, I get stomach cramps and I hit a wall. How can I improve my nutrition plan to help my performance during the marathon?

Goals of Nutrition During Exercise

- Provide fuel early and often to boost performance and improve recovery. Aim for 30-60g of carbohydrates per hour for endurance exercise beyond 60 minutes.
- Prevent dehydration by starting activities well hydrated and consuming fluids during activity. Weigh before and after exercise to determine how much to replenish (See Exercise Hydration fact sheet for more details).
- Determine the best combination and amount of fuels for you (e.g. liquids, sports foods, whole foods) to sustain energy and minimize gastrointestinal (GI) discomfort.

During Exercise Foods & Fluids

- Begin fueling and hydrating within the first 15 minutes of extended exercise to prevent depletion and dehydration. Fluids consumed with carbohydrate-rich foods speed fuel transport to muscles.
- Based on preference and GI tolerance, consume products with multiple sources of carbohydrate (e.g. glucose + sucrose + fructose) that allow for greater rates of absorption.
 - Sport nutrition products that contain carbohydrate and electrolytes: sports drinks, gels, beans, or chews
 - Easily digested carbohydrate-rich foods: banana, bread with jam/honey, dried fruit, fruit/veggie puree pouch, pretzels, small baked potatoes, rice cakes, bite-sized pieces of granola or sports bars
- Examples of ~30g carbohydrate:
 - Energy gel/chews (22-27g)
 - Sport drink (~28g/16oz)
 - Medium banana (~27g)
 - 1oz pretzels (~23g)
 - Fruit puree pouch (~20g)



Tips to Take With You

1. Start with a full tank. Begin exercise well-hydrated and with adequate muscle fuel (carbohydrate).
2. Begin consuming both carbohydrate and fluids early to preserve energy stores and prevent dehydration.
3. A sports registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) can provide suggestions for food/fluid combinations during training sessions based on your specific needs

Contact SCAN

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Written by SCAN registered dietitian nutritionists (RDN) to provide nutrition guidance. The key to optimal meal planning is individualization. For personalized nutrition plans contact a SCAN sports dietitian or Board Certified Specialist in Sports Dietetics (CSSD) by accessing "Find a SCAN Dietitian" at www.scandpg.org