

NUTRITION TIPS

'Healthy eating' needn't be 'fun free', we need fat in our diet to remain healthy; we need carbohydrate in our diet and we need fibre too. At the end of the day it's a question of balance.

Leading up to your event you should try to follow a healthy balanced diet. The training is very physically demanding, so you will need to increase your calorie intake. Food choices are important when training for any fitness challenge and whether you are looking at your race as a fun day out or a race against the clock, subtle changes to what you eat and drink will help to improve your performance and help keep you healthy so you can train regularly and also recover afterwards.

Fluid intake is especially important during training. It is vital to drink plenty of water before and after exercise sessions — aim to drink two litres of water per day. Try to reduce your intake of tea, coffee, sugary drinks and alcohol.

Increase your intake of fruit and vegetables high in vitamins A, C and E as they contain anti-oxidants, which help to reduce toxin build up in the body. Eat lots of the following:

- Non citrus fruits such as strawberries, cherries and pears
- Brightly coloured vegetables such as peppers, carrots and aubergines
- Green vegetables, especially broccoli, courgettes and spinach

As always try and stick to the daily recommended intake of at least five fruit and vegetable portions per day. Everybody should try and do this as part of a healthy diet. 80g makes up a portion e.g. one apple, two plums, a glass of fruit juice, two heaped tablespoons of peas or one bowl of salad.

It is important to get enough protein, but you don't need to overdo it. Try and incorporate one or two servings of fish per week. White fish is a great low fat option and oily fish, like sardines or salmon gives us a good supply of unsaturated omega-3 fats.

Try and get around 60% of your calories from carbohydrates — at least one rice, pasta or potato portion per day should cover this. Think of these foods as fuel — these will give your muscles the energy you need to train.

You will have depleted your energy stores during your race or workout, so try to consume some carbohydrates as soon as possible. This will speed up your recovery and enable your body to rebuild, restock and be ready for your next exercise session. During the 15-minute post exercise your muscles are very receptive to loading up with fuel and can restock at a much faster rate than usual. By refuelling correctly after exercise you will experience less overall fatigue for the remainder of the day. Even if you are not feeling very hungry try a piece of fruit and yoghurt. Within two hours of exercise you should try to eat a balanced meal of complex carbohydrates and low fat protein, for instance chicken with pasta. Go for wholegrain varieties where possible.

There is some sense in 'loading up' on carbohydrates the night before as they are slow energy releasers, but try healthier options such as brown rice, wholemeal or wheat free pasta with a light non dairy sauce. Don't eat anything too high in fat or heavy in protein or you'll find it sitting on your stomach in the morning. Drink plenty of water the night before the race. On the morning of the race get up nice and early and have a light breakfast. Porridge made with water and a little honey would be a good option.

You will also need to experiment with forms of energy to take on board during the race. There are many different options ranging from pre mixed sports drinks to powdered energy gels and bars. You should look for something that contains long chain carbohydrates (usually in the form of maltodextrin) rather than glucose. Use a variety on your training runs and find the one that suits you, and your stomach, the best. Do not simply wait for race day to try whatever the organisers are laying on. You need to also get used to drinking while running, most people 'hit the wall' because they are simply dehydrated. Work on a steady intake of one litre per hour of running/walking.

GUIDANCE FOR ALL CHALLENGE EVENTS

All people have different levels of 'trainability' and natural potential. It is possible for complete beginners to make very rapid progress and move up through the targets, while others find initially that they can't achieve the early training levels.

Remember the two golden rules: a) build up very gradually and b) you must rest and recover to enable the training to become beneficial.

The Willow Foundation does not accept responsibility for any injury, loss or damage to you or your property incurred during participation in a challenge event. Any participants are advised to consult their own doctor before taking part in any exercise programme, especially if you are overweight, over 40 and/or are not used to exercising.

GUIDANCE FOR RUNNING EVENTS

TEMPO RUN - Improves running pace and efficiency and improves race times, but avoids the fatigue and muscle soreness of long race running. You run at a hard, controlled pace. Many athletes run measured one-mile units at tempo pace broken up by three or four minutes of recovery jogging.

LONG RUN - This is the focus of your training week. You should run at the kind of pace you will be running in the race itself. The level of effort should be roughly 6/10 (where 0 is no effort at all and 10 is all-out sprinting).

EASY RUN - Slow recovery run at slower than race pace. You should be able to hold a conversation at this pace.

Wear well-cushioned shoes. Good running shoes are a must. Please take advice from a good sports shop. When you run your feet absorb over three times your body weight each time they strike the ground and the shock reverberates up your legs and through your spine; but a good pair of shoes should significantly reduce this effect.

Stay well hydrated. Even when asleep your body loses fluids and obviously even more during exercise. Even mild dehydration can make you feel bad, slow you down and give you a headache.

Try and run as much as possible on softer surfaces such as trails to help cushion the impact and when on roads try to avoid the camber, which puts undue pressure on one side of the body.

Never wear headphones while running – be aware of what is happening around you. Try to run with friends or family – it makes it safer and also more enjoyable.

Alternate running with other aerobic activity such as swimming and cycling to prevent wear on your joints

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