

Eating During Exercise

Athlete Scenario

In the three marathons I've run, I perform well the first half and then struggle to reach the finish line. I drink sports drink and eat energy gels throughout the race. After about 2 hours, I get stomach cramps that slow me down. Although I know that nutrition is important, I can't get it to work for me. How can I use nutrition to help me perform well throughout my marathon?

Goals of Nutrition Before Exercise

- Optimal fuel blend: Nutrition during prolonged exercise requires the proper mix and timing of fluids, carbohydrate, and electrolytes. Too little fluid or too much carbohydrate can result in cramping and other intestinal problems.
- Adequate fluids to replace sweat losses: Prevent excessive fluid loss (>2% body weight lost as fluid). Dehydration can cause fatigue and impair performance. Knowing your sweat rate will help you determine the right amount of fluid to drink.
- A plan tailored to YOUR needs: A nutrition plan based on YOUR needs can help maximize performance. Experiment with sport drinks and foods for different types of workouts and competitions. Record your tolerance to learn what works best.

During Exercise Foods & Fluids

- Sports drinks that contain carbohydrate and electrolytes, while avoiding ingredients that may slow digestion.
- Easily digested carbohydrate-rich foods during endurance events, for example, banana, bread or roll with jam or honey, sports foods (gels, gummy chews), or bite-sized pieces of low-fat granola or sports bars.
- Fluids consumed with carbohydrate gels or carbohydrate-rich foods to speed fuel transport to muscles.



Tips to Take With You

1. Start with a full tank. Begin exercise well hydrated and with adequate muscle fuel (carbohydrate).
2. Try new products and foods during training sessions to determine the type, amount, and timing of foods and fluids that work best for you.
3. Consume fluids early and consistently to replace sweat losses. Calculate your sweat rate and sweat losses to determine your fluid needs.

Contact SCAN

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Written by SCAN registered dietitians (RDs). The key to optimal meal planning for athletes 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 | 800.249.2875.