

RUNNER'S DIET PLAN

What's the latest fad diet? I'm hearing a lot about the "South Beach" diet, aren't you? When are people going to get it? Fad diets don't work. And you, as runners, probably know that they don't work for you either.

Runners, just like everybody else, simply need to balance their calories and nutrients. We all need a certain amount of calories per day, and we need a certain amount of carbohydrates, protein, fat, vitamins and minerals. The main difference between runners and non-runners is simply runners need MORE – especially carbohydrates, calories, and to some extent, protein.

The energy equation is very simple, and when it comes to OUR energy, we're talking calories. To meet our energy needs, we need to consume enough calories. When we take in too many, we gain weight, and when we take in too few, we lose weight. Weight maintenance is that simple. It takes 3,500 calories OVER what we need to gain one pound. On average, runners will consume between 2,500 and 3,500 calories per day. The best way a runner can determine energy needs is to look at energy levels (intake of calories) and weight. If you have plenty of energy and your weight is stable, you know you are consuming the proper amount of energy. If you have plenty of energy, and despite your increased running, you're still gaining weight, then you're taking in too many calories. You may have heard that you will burn 100 calories per every mile you run. This is a decent guess, but it really comes down to your body weight and your metabolism.

Along with balancing calories, runners, like everybody else, need to balance the essential nutrients of carbohydrates, protein, and fat. A healthy balance of these nutrients is 15% protein, 60% carbohydrates, and 25% fat. During some intense training days, it's even best to up the carbohydrate to 70% and cut the fat back to 15%.

Carbohydrates are the runner's best friend. Without them, your training will suffer, if not stop. I've read lately that some runners are jumping into the low carb craze. This is a big mistake. As I stated above, 60-70% of your diet should be carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are the primary fuel for the working muscles. If the carbs are not present, the body will start to burn muscle tissue, which will lower your metabolism. Carbs equate to energy. Carbohydrates are stored in the body as glycogen. Your muscles store 400 grams and your liver stores 100 grams. This is 2,000 calories of stored carbohydrates that your body will call upon! Normally, runners ingest 350 to 450 grams of carbs per day. But again, listen to your body. If you feel sluggish, or your legs feel dead, chances are you're running low on carbs.

Runners also need to make sure they get enough protein. Protein is needed for muscle and cell repair. In extreme cases, protein is used for energy. Protein also helps regulate your blood sugar. Typically, it is only 15% of a runner's diet. To get an idea, divide your body weight by 2.2 to convert to kilograms and multiply this number by 1.0 to 1.2. This will give most runners a good starting point as to how many grams of protein you need each day. The protein multiplier for "normal" people is 0.8, so as you see, runners need more. Listen to your body. If you don't recover well from workouts, you could be deficient in protein. There are quite a few studies that

indicate endurance athletes actually require more protein than strength athletes. But you don't want to overdo protein because too much too often can damage your kidneys and/or liver.

We also need some intake of fat. Fat got a bad rap in the 80's as the "fat producer", but actually fat is just more calorically dense. One gram of fat has 9 calories versus 4 per gram of carbohydrate. I hope you realize now that there really is not "fat producer" – yes, even you carb-phobics. What puts fat on is too much intake of calories. The norm for fat is 25% of your diet. It can go as low as 15% when you're trying to make room for more carbohydrates during carbo loading or intense training. Unsaturated fat actually has healthy properties, especially monounsaturated fat. Studies have shown that it can actually reduce cholesterol. Most importantly, fat provides energy. This is fat's biggest job.

Runners, like everybody, also need to make sure they're getting all of their vitamins and minerals. A lot of our food choices in this day and age have been stripped down, so our food is lacking its natural vitamins and minerals. For this, I always advise taking some sort of multivitamin and mineral supplement.

Eating healthfully also goes beyond the balance of energy and nutrients. Meal timing counts also. Your body can only use so many nutrients at one time. For example, your body will only process 25 grams of protein at one time. So, it's best to space your meals out and eat frequent, smaller meals rather than three big ones. This is also best for weight maintenance. Eating small, frequent meals keeps the metabolism cranked up for more time during the day. Eating large meals is also very tough on the digestive system. So eating five 500 calorie meals is better than eating three 800 calorie meals.

A VERY HEALTHY EATING DAY FOR A RUNNER:

MEAL ONE:

1 CUP OF OATMEAL WITH ½ CUP SKIM OR SOY MILK WITH STRAWBERRIES ON TOP

MEAL TWO:

1 LOW FAT YOGURT OR COTTAGE CHEESE AND A PIECE OF FRUIT

MEAL THREE:

1 SMALL CAN TUNA MIXED WITH LOW FAT MAYO ON 2 SLICES SOURDOUGH BREAD WITH LETTUCE AND TOMATO

MEAL FOUR:

1-2 CUPS SOY OR SKIM MILK WITH 1-2 PIECES FRUIT

MEAL FIVE:

4 OZ FISH OR CHICKEN, 1 CUP BROWN RICE, 1 CUP BROCCOLI, SMALL DINNER SALAD WITH OLIVE OIL DRESSING