



"NRXC is a group of friends that have fun running together and are excellent in our integrity, teamwork, and fitness."

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NRXC Nutritional Resources¹

PLEASE NOTE: We are not trained nutritionists. These are general guidelines based on self-education, our own experience, and what we've seen generally work well for athletes. If you are struggling with any aspect of nutrition or your relationship with eating or food, please talk to one of us, your parents, your teammates or friends, or a professional, as appropriate.

Running puts a high demand on your body's energy systems, muscle, and bones. During the summer, you will be training every day, and if you are not eating enough, you can start feeling tired all the time and put yourself at risk of getting injured.

Tiredness and injury not only limit your ability run fast but can also reduce your general health and quality of life. If you persist in training without enough fuel, you can have long-term negative health consequences. That's why we want you to fuel your training. A good nutritional mantra for training and life is: ***Eat enough, always. Eat too much, sometimes. Eat too little, never.***

In order to be the best person you can be, in all aspects of your life—whether as a son, daughter, sister, brother, student, friend, employee, or athlete—you must be nourished and healthy. It is important to understand that, as a young adult, you are in different stage of life than children and adults around you. Your body is constantly growing and developing. When you add a substantial training load on top of that, you almost certainly need to eat more than you think.

While fully grown adults sometimes watch their calories because their metabolisms have slowed, the principal danger for teenage distance athletes is not eating too much; ***it is eating too little.*** If you mimic the eating habits of some adults, whose bodies are fully grown and who likely do not have your same level of activity, you risk underfueling your training and encountering the negative consequences that can result.

We are not suggesting you eat until you're sick, that you should always eat everything you want, or that what you eat does not matter for your performance. But what we ***are*** suggesting is that underfueling presents a potentially serious risk to your health and performance. If you're unsure about a nutritional decision, it's best to err on the side of eating more rather than less.

This guide is intended as a practical resource to give you ideas about when and what to eat, and to emphasize to you that ***food is the fuel for, and not the enemy of, health and performance.***

¹ Credit to Coach Carrie Fredin, Dr. Jeffrey Messer, and David & Dr. Megan Roche for many of the ideas in this resource.

I. Basic Nutritional Principles

A. *Don't cut out categories of foods.* As a runner, you should eat each of the three basic types of foods.

- Carbohydrates (foods like bread, rice, pasta, potatoes, and sugars) provide much of the energy you use when running (and virtually ALL the energy you use when racing) and the essential energy to keep your brain functioning.
- Protein helps to rebuild and strengthen muscle tissues and regulate blood sugar. Protein (especially from red meat) is a good source of iron, which is an essential nutrient for running fast and training hard.
- Fats provide flavor for our food and help carry nutrients. They also are an extremely efficient source of fuel for the easier running that comprises most of our training. Having an appropriate level of healthy body fat also tends to protect against injury.

B. *Eat something before running*

Although you may not realize it, you fast every day while you sleep. During summer training, if you don't eat breakfast, you are running in a fasted state. Please try and get in some food and water before you run. It will tend to make your runs more enjoyable. Don't eat so much that you're too full or get side aches, but try to get in a few calories and some water before stressing your body by training.

C. *Stay hydrated*

Although we train in the early mornings, the temperature is often warm and it can be easy to become dehydrated without realizing it. You may also be dehydrated from not drinking enough the rest of the day. When you are dehydrated, performance suffers and you stress your body, which can be dangerous if it goes on too long or training is too intense. Drink regularly throughout the day, but especially before, during, and immediately after exercise, to reduce the risk of dehydration.

D. *Replenish electrolytes*

When we sweat, we lose salt and other essential minerals (known as electrolytes) that balance the fluids in our body. You ingest electrolytes when you eat, but they are also present in sports drinks like Gatorade. If you've been sweating a lot during training, drinking a sports drink as well as water can be a good idea, especially if you can't eat for a while after finishing training. Opt for the normal sugar version (*i.e.*, not the zero-calorie version) of these drinks.

E. *Eat during long runs and after runs and workouts*

When we train, we leave our body in a depleted state. Recovering and benefitting from our training depends, in a meaningful way, on replenishing our body's glycogen stores and giving it the nutrients it needs to rebound, improve, and adapt. The sooner we do this, the better our recovery will be. When our recovery is good, subsequent training sessions are better. When our recovery is poor, subsequent training suffers, and we can even enter a cycle when the more we train the worse we perform because we are driving our body deeper into a hole rather than recovering and adapting. Eat during long runs and quickly after runs and workouts. Start that recovery clock!

II. Practical Tips

A. *Eat Early*

Your metabolism is running hot, and it's important to fuel first thing in the morning after the long period between dinner and when you wake up in the morning. We meet for summer training early to beat the heat, and your body might not feeling like eating before you leave for practice. It is important however, to consume 200-400 calories of high-quality carbohydrates, some healthy fat, and some protein before you come to training. You will perform better, feel better while running and recover better if you eat before your morning run. We must train our bodies to tolerate running and in much the same way you can train your gut to tolerate food before you run. Experiment with different foods to find what works best to fuel you first thing in the morning. Even if you can't get in the ideal snack, try to get in something! See the next page for some ideas.

B. *Eat Often*

You need to eat frequently throughout the day. It is especially important to fuel with carbohydrates and protein within a half hour of finishing your run. Then consume a good meal within two hours. Fueling to rebuild the muscles that you have broken down while training can be the secret to getting the most out of your training. It will take a little planning to make sure that you have healthy meals and snacks available throughout your day. Plan! It's worth it not just for your running training, but for building good eating habits that will stay with you throughout life as more demands are placed on your time.

Aim to consume water regularly throughout the day. Many of our body's functions rely on taking in enough water. Use water as your main source of hydration rather than sweetened drinks, although a sports drink can be helpful during and immediately after training to replenish electrolytes.

C. *Eat Well, But Don't Stress About Being Perfect*

Choose high quality foods to fuel you most of the time. Prepackaged, processed foods tend to be high in calories and low in nutrition. Seek to eat foods as close to the source as possible, for example, choose an apple over apple juice. Whole, healthy foods will be high in nutrition. Limit soda, candy, baked, sweet goods and other treats to occasionally and usually in smaller portions. Fill up on fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods.

D. *Add in, rather than cut out, foods*

There is room in a healthy diet for treats and fun foods. There are no "good" or "bad" foods. Each type of food can have its place in the diet of a competitive runner, including donuts, cookies, and soda. Instead of trying to cut out all of a certain type of food, aim to add in healthy, whole foods, and try to eat a little better at least 80 percent of the time. Don't stress about eating perfectly all the time.

III. Some Food and Snack Ideas

A. Breakfast

- Oatmeal with fruit and nuts
- Whole grain toast with peanut butter and a banana
- Yogurt and granola
- Fruit (apple, banana, or orange, or fresh berries)
- Pancakes or waffles topped with fruit
- Healthier cereals that are low in sugar with milk
- Eggs
- Protein shake
- Smoothie bowl

B. Lunch

- Sandwiches and/or wraps
- Yogurt and granola
- Apple slices or celery with peanut butter
- Granola or protein bar
- Dinner leftovers

C. Dinner

- There are too many ideas to list here. But try and make sure your dinners include a mix of carbohydrates, protein, and fats. For best translation to running performance, around 60% should be comprised of carbohydrates.
- Some example meals include:
 - Baked salmon, roasted sweet potatoes and steamed spinach
 - Baked chicken thighs, roasted white potatoes and green salad
 - Loaded baked sweet potatoes, top a baked sweet potato with black beans, salsa, cheese, and sour cream
- Even if your meals are not perfectly nutritious or perfectly balanced, cooking meals at home versus eating out can make a big difference in the quality of your nutrition. I know every home situation is different, but just striving for meals at home (or even occasional meals at home) can be helpful.

D. Snacks

- Try to carry healthy snacks with you during the day. There are many ideas above. It makes it easy to eat well, providing a filling alternative to the processed foods available at convenience stores and vending machines.

E. Resources

- The cookbook "[Run Fast, Eat Slow](#)," and its companion resource, "[Run Fast, Cook Fast, Eat Slow](#)," both by Shalane Flanagan are excellent and balanced resources we recommend to all runners.

IV. How to Tell If I'm Underfueling

It can be hard to tell if you're underfueling. Even the best athletes in the world struggle with this. You can be eating a lot but still not be eating enough. You might compare yourself to someone else and think you're eating too much. Because it can be difficult to know if you're eating enough, it's a good idea to regularly assess yourself and consider whether you're either underfueling or not getting all the nutrients you need. Some potential signs of underfueling include:

- A. Being chronically (meaning always or usually) tired even though you're sleeping enough.
- B. Even though you're training consistently, your performance is suffering, and you're not sure why.
- C. Even easy runs seem hard every day.
- D. You can't seem to stop getting injured.
- E. You're often hungry during the day.
- F. You're someone who usually loves to work hard and progress and is happy and excited about life, but lately you've lost interest in training and might be feeling depressed.
- G. You're more irritable than normal.
- H. Decreased libido.
- I. For females, your menstrual cycle has stopped or become irregular.

Obviously, overtraining and underfueling are not the only reasons why you might experience the symptoms outlined above, but they are a consideration, especially for young athletes training at a high level. Sometimes simply eating a little more can help.

V. Vegetarianism and Veganism

We know that, for many, vegetarianism and veganism are as much moral choices as health choices. While we would never presume to dictate someone's decision to be a vegetarian or vegan, we want to caution you that sufficient protein intake is vital for athletes to properly recover, perform, and avoid injury.

If you are a vegetarian or a vegan athlete training at a high level, as we do at NRXC, you must be **especially** serious and committed to getting in a large amount of high quality protein each day. We are not vegetarian or vegan, so we are not experts in this regard. But we can learn together and make sure you're getting your nutritional needs met. If you are vegan or vegetarian, **PLEASE** let us know so that we can discuss appropriate nutritional options for you.

VI. Weight, Body Image, Performance, and Your Relationship With Food

Like it or not, we are all in a long-term relationship with food. You need to have a healthy approach to fueling your body. This can take time, practice, and patience, but it's worth it! Again, there are no "good" or "bad" foods. There are foods with better nutritional value and foods with less nutritional value, and there are foods with different kinds of nutritional value. You don't have to run a certain number of miles to "earn" your calories. Give yourself permission to fuel your body and it will reward you with the ability to chase your goals!

We tend to have an image in our mind of what a distance runner should look like. But the reality is different. If you look at professional runners, you will see all different kinds of body types and shapes. The reality is that the fastest version of you is not the lightest or skinniest version of you...it is in the strongest version of you. And being strong requires both training *and* fueling that training.

You may see others who are performing at a very high level and look like they are intentionally underfueling their body. We can't judge them because, ultimately, we don't know their situation. ***But please, please know and believe*** that performance gains obtained this way are temporary at best and come with very high short and long-term costs. The best path to long-term development as a runner, good physical health, and a positive relationship with exercise, fitness, and food, is not to fight your body, but to learn what it needs and appreciate what it can do.

Although it is a personal decision, if it were up to us athletes would never look at the scale. In our minds, there is no such thing as "racing weight." If you eat enough, and eat healthy, and train consistently, your body will adjust naturally to optimally perform at your chosen sport. It will take time, but it will be sustainable and you will be healthy and happy.

All this said, it is normal to struggle, especially with comparison, when it comes to weight, body image, and nutrition. Don't feel bad if you do. It doesn't make you weak or a bad person. But realize that you have parents, family, friends, teammates, and coaches that are pulling for you and have some resources we can offer to help. As a teammate as well as an athlete, one of the things you can do for others is to provide friendship and encouragement to (while never criticizing or harshly judging) others who may be struggling with nutritional choices.