Gazelle Sports

Food/Fuel considerations in training

Nutrition is an important factor in becoming and being fit and in performing our best. It is important to have a plan that works for your body to prepare, perform and recover in training and racing.

Before Workout
For many people, it can be difficult to have anything in their stomach before running; however, eating prior to a longer run can be critically important as workouts that go beyond one hour. We recommend eating one to two hours before a long run. For runs under one hour, runners do not necessarily need to eat but may feel better if they do – it is a personal choice.

For most runners, eating a food with simply and complex carbohydrates like oatmeal or toast/jam provides an easy to digest and good start for a long run. Others may choose an energy bar or beverage that is formulated to provide an elevated, consistent energy level over an extended period of time. These typically include a balanced mix of simple and complex carbohydrates, some protein and fiber.

It is good to get use to eating something prior to running by slowly introducing light foods or energy bars on longer training runs.

During Workout
During a workout or race, no matter what type, you need to quickly absorb carbohydrate-based calories to replace the glucose you are burning at 400 - 600 calories per hour or you will begin to lose concentration and energy.
There are several alternatives to fuel the body during exercise.
Food like fruits
Sports Drinks
Energy Gels/GU
Energy Bars
Energy Gelatins
These are designed for easy digestion and absorption into your bloodstream. The goal is to provide sustained energy through a gradual rise (not a spike) in energy followed by a similarly gradual decline. Chews, gels and beverages are favorites due to their simplicity and agreeable taste.

Also during exercise proper fluid intake is critical. Good hydration helps to prevent overheating and increases your blood flow, transporting vital nutrients and oxygen to your working muscles, which is the most important factor for a good workout. Yet during exercise water is not enough to keep your body properly hydrated. Your body needs electrolytes in the correct ratio to replace the sodium and potassium you are losing through sweat. At the same time, your body needs complex carbohydrates (not sugar) to maintain your blood glucose and muscle glycogen at levels necessary to have a great workout/race from start to finish.

Again, some runners have some difficulty taking different types of fuel sources while running. It is important to experiment and find what works best for you.

What is GU?
GU is the most popular energy gel for endurance activities. GU is a convenient, carbohydrate gel formulated to energize before, sustain during, and aid in recovery after your training and competitions. Made with a unique blend of ingredients, GU provides: complex carbohydrates for sustained energy, amino acids to maintain muscle protein, antioxidants and muscle buffers to aid with recovery.

Recovery Phase
If rehydration were the only factor to enhancing performance, a conventional sports drink would be enough. But athletes don't just need to rehydrate, their muscles need to recover, too. Protein speeds muscle recovery. During prolonged exercise, up to 10% of the muscles' energy can come from metabolizing protein, which can come from the breakdown of muscle. Having protein in sports drink minimizes the breakdown of protein from the muscle during exercise. The result can be a quicker recovery.

The ability of any athlete to perform at their best is directly related to how fast their muscles recover after exercise. Protein-enhanced recovery drinks gives muscles a jump-start on getting back to peak performance. In fact, recovery drinks have been shown to significantly reduce muscle damage following exercise. Compared to a conventional sports drink, it minimizes muscle soreness. These are fortified with proteins, amino acids and other muscle-restoring elements to help hasten the repair and restoration of cells in your body.

What do these products offer that traditional foods cannot?
Easy portability. Bananas, as great as they are as energy boosters, quickly get beat up when transported in an adventurer's pack.
Long shelf life. No refrigeration (or similar food-handling precautions) needed.
Convenience. What you need (concentrated, specialized nutrients), when you need it (any time you choose) and where you need it (any place you choose).

Which items are best suited for you? We suggest you experiment with various products. Stick with the ones that:

- deliver the best results for you
- feel most comfortable in your stomach
- offer the most appealing flavor and texture for your tastes.
- Many products can serve more than one of these functions. But these general designations can help guide you to choices best suited to your needs.
- How many of these items do you need? It depends on the intensity of your activity or workout. For a light training run, for example, you may not need any. A more moderate run may call for just a single item from one of these categories. The more demanding (and prolonged) your activity, the more options your body may likely need to sustain peak performance.

Try different methods during your training so that you can be confident on race day!