

FUELLING UP ON A RUN

Keeping your energy levels up is extremely important particularly in longer races such as half and full marathons. There are a wide range of gels and sports drinks available to help, but get it wrong and you could up with a stomach cramp and nausea. So here's how to get it right and you maintain your energy levels all the way to the finish.

1 WHY YOU NEED IT

Any race or training session longer than 90 minutes will start to seriously deplete your muscle energy stores, which will affect the speed you can run. Gels and sports drinks provide energy in the form of carbohydrate that is easily digestible. It's quickly absorbed by the muscles whilst you are exercising and is a far better option than plain water or your Mum's homemade flapjacks.

2 JUST ENOUGH

Your stomach can only absorb so much whilst you are running and studies have shown that 40-60grams of carbohydrates per hour is the limit. This equates to 500-750ml of sports drink every hour or a gel every 30-45 minutes. Any more and your stomach will have a hard time trying to digest it, leaving you feeling uncomfortable at best and vomiting at worst. You may need less, so experiment to find what works for you.

3 THE ONE FOR YOU

If you don't like the taste of a sports drink or gel you will be less inclined to use it during a race. It doesn't matter if it's scientifically proven to improve your performance it can't help you if you don't actually use it, so try different brands and different flavours until you find one you like.

4 PRACTICE IN TRAINING

GET USED TO CONSUMING GELS AND SPORTS DRINKS IN TRAINING TO FIND OUT IF THEY ARE STILL PALATABLE AFTER YOUR 4TH GEL OR YOUR 3RD BOTTLE OF SPORTS DRINK. SOMETIMES WHAT STARTS OFF TASTING LIKE THE NECTAR OF THE GODS CAN TURN INTO A SICKLY EVIL POTION TWO HOURS LATER.

6 RACE STRATEGIES

IF YOU ARE USING GELS WORK OUT HOW MANY YOU NEED FOR YOUR RACE AND HOW YOU ARE GOING TO CARRY THEM. THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT WAYS TO DO THIS – FROM TUCKING THEM INTO YOUR SHORTS TO USING SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED BELTS. IF YOU ARE USING SPORTS DRINKS CALCULATE HOW MUCH YOU NEED TO CONSUME PER HOUR TO ENSURE YOU OBTAIN SUFFICIENT CARBOHYDRATES. YOU COULD EITHER CARRY A BOTTLE OF YOUR OWN OR RELY ON WHAT THE RACE PROVIDES AT THE AID STATIONS – BUT MAKE SURE YOU HAVE TRIED WHATEVER BRAND THE RACE IS PROVIDING IN TRAINING.

7 GELS OR DRINKS?

Which one should you use? Gels are easier to carry, but some people find the taste or texture unpalatable. It comes down to personal preference and what a race may provide. All races will provide water but not all provide sports drinks, so if you need more than one bottle you may need to carry some gels to keep you going.

5 JUST ADD WATER

Some gels need water to aid digestion so make sure you have some plain water available (not sports drink). Although instructions for other gels state you don't need to consume them with water, most people find they go down easier and don't leave a sickly sweet aftertaste in the mouth if you do sip water with them.

8 START EARLY

Don't wait till you start feeling low in energy to open your gels or drink your sports drink. Plan to have them at regular intervals throughout your race. It is easier to keep your energy levels topped up than rescue them from a pit of fatigue later in a race. RF

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