

Little Miss Greedy quickly found her favourite corner of the gym



Little Miss Greedy

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THE IMPORTANCE OF A BALANCED DIET

We want to make sure that you are eating properly in the build up to Race Day and encourage you to read this summary of how to manage your diet over the next few months.

We are all becoming more aware of the physiological and psychological rewards of being physically active. If you need to lose weight or want to avoid becoming overweight, then the best way is to increase your physical activity levels, and to reduce your dietary fat intake, which can be achieved by increasing your intake of starchy and sugary carbohydrates. Even if you didn't lose weight, but became fitter, it would help you to avoid the many health complications of being overweight and so increase your life quality and expectancy. Furthermore, taking part in regular physical activity also helps reduce your risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis and certain forms of cancer. And, don't forget, the important role that physical activity plays in your mental well-being.

DIETARY CONSIDERATIONS - THINK CARBOHYDRATES

As we all know, a healthy and balanced diet is essential for good health. The key to making our diet healthy and balanced is simple - everything in moderation, plus extra carbohydrates if you're exercising.

But why the emphasis on carbohydrates? Well, no matter what type of exercise you do, your body will always use some glucose for energy. Glucose is formed from the breakdown of carbohydrates - the sugars and starches in your diet - and is stored as glycogen. However, the body can only store a limited amount of glycogen, so the stores need to be kept topped-up to avoid fatigue. If you don't eat enough carbohydrates, but continue to exercise, you will soon become sluggish and dizzy and your exercise goals will go right out the window!

The more physical activity you do, the more glucose your body uses, the more carbohydrates you need to consume to replenish your stores. Therefore, physically active people need to consume a diet where more than half of it comes from carbohydrate foods.

The bulk of your carbohydrate intake should come from starchy sources such as bread, rice, potatoes and pasta, and the remaining from more sugary sources such as sugar, fruit and juices. However, as most carbohydrate foods, for example pasta or sugars, are eventually broken down into glucose, one type is not necessarily better than the other. But, if you're exercising regularly, you need to eat a lot of carbohydrates, and there is only so much bread and pasta you can eat, so this is where sugary snacks and drinks have a useful role to play, both in providing you with energy before you exercise, and in helping you restock your glucose stores after exercise ready for your next bout of physical activity.



Although you need to allow two to three hours after a large meal before exercising, a high carbohydrate snack within 30 minutes of training has several benefits. Eating 25-50 grams of rapidly absorbed carbohydrate just before exercise will not only improve performance, but will also help maintain your blood sugar levels and so prevent you feeling light-headed. There are plenty of portable high carbohydrate snacks to choose from - bagels, honey or jam sandwiches, cereal bars, bananas, watermelon, dried fruit, Jaffa cakes, jelly beans, Liquorice Allsorts, juice or a sports drink.

LOADS OF LIQUIDS

When you run, you get hot and you sweat - even more so when the weather is warm. This means your body needs extra water to keep you cool and to replace the fluid you lose in sweat. Most of us don't drink enough anyway so it means you will have to think about the amount you are drinking and really make an effort to keep yourself well hydrated. If you don't drink enough your performance will be affected. As well as water, you can drink fruit juice or squash and moderate amounts of the caffeine containing drinks you normally have (eg. coffee, tea, cola drinks). Keep alcohol to a minimum, as it will contribute to dehydration.

The amount of liquids required is different for everyone, and it will vary for you depending on, for example, your training schedule and the weather. One of the best ways to tell whether you are drinking enough is to check the colour of your urine - you should have pale and plentiful urine.

Drink before, during and after training. Water is usually easiest, but you may choose any drink, as long as you drink enough throughout the day to keep you hydrated. Some people use isotonic drinks whilst running. These contain both fluid and carbohydrate in a balance that will be absorbed quickly, but it is up to you what you drink whilst you run - just practice drinking what will be available on the day of the race so you can judge your needs more easily.

Based on information supplied by The Sugar Bureau

