

FOODS THAT BOOST ENERGY

Whether you're injured or just tired, these foods will help you bounce back fast

By Kelly Bastone

Runners would no sooner skip prerun carbs than dash out the door bare-foot. But when the miles are done, those same athletes might not think much at all about what they eat, as long as they get something. Injured runners logging time on the bike might even skip a meal altogether, in fear of gaining weight. Big mistake. Whether you're recovering from a tough tempo run or tendinitis, food delivers the nutrients your body needs to repair itself, making smart eating crucial to a strong body and a speedy recovery. "Recovery is just like fixing a house," says Cynthia Sass, R.D., a sports dietetics specialist in Tampa, Florida. "A crack in the foundation requires raw materials to patch things back together. In the body, those raw materials come from what we eat."

A combination of proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals helps your body heal microtears from exercise and overused tendons and sprained ligaments. "Every part of the body is dependent on food for repair," says David Grotto, R.D., a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. On a cellular level, those repairs are constant, sidelining injury or not. Over time, if cells don't get the nutrients they need, muscles and connective tissues can weaken, leaving them more susceptible to injury. "The decisions we make with our fork can set up roadblocks against future injuries," Grotto says. So along with stretching, and icing if you need it, these healing foods will help you get back on the road as quickly as possible.

Red Bell Pepper

Just one red bell pepper provides 380 percent of the recommended Daily Value of vitamin C, a nutrient crucial for repairing connective tissues and cartilage. By contributing to the formation of collagen, an important protein used to build scar tissue, blood vessels, and even new bone cells, vitamin C facilitates the healing process. "Work in vitamin C throughout the day, every two or three hours or so," says Sass, for five daily servings. Runners-up: papaya, cantaloupe, oranges

Salmon

Salmon's nutritional benefits have been much touted for good reason. Fresh or canned, salmon delivers two powerful healing nutrients: protein and omega-3 fatty acids. Protein does more than rebuild muscle after a grueling run; it also repairs bones, ligaments, and tendons. "We tend to forget that healing really means building new cells," says Sass. "And your body needs protein to make those new cells." She recommends all runners eat protein at every meal; injured runners should aim for four to five servings a day, from low-fat sources like egg whites and lean turkey. Salmon, with two grams of essential fatty acids per four-ounce serving, is doubly valuable. "Omega-3s are significant anti-inflammatories," says Grotto. "Eating fish high in omega-3s or taking supplements is like throwing a big bucket of ice water on inflammation." Inflammation occurs when waste matter generated by the body's repair efforts builds up around the injury, inhibiting

healing. Omega-3s help disperse that buildup, making them useful in addressing everything from sore muscles to stress fractures. Runners-up: mackerel, flaxseeds, walnuts

Carrots

Eat carrots for a potent dose of vitamin A: a half-cup serving provides 340 percent of your Daily Value. This nutrient helps make white blood cells for fighting infection, "which is always a risk with injury," says Sass. You might not think infection is likely with tendinitis, but your body takes no chances and activates the immune system, which ups vitamin A demand. Vitamin A also helps repair postworkout microtears, so it's a valuable ally every day. Runners-up: sweet potatoes, dried apricots, spinach

Fortified Cereals

Zinc is an important healing agent, but foods highest in zinc, like red meats, often contain saturated fat, which aggravates inflammation. So when the body is taxed--from exertion or injury--runners should reach for fortified whole-grain breakfast cereals, which can deliver as much as 100 percent of the Daily Value for zinc. By itself, zinc doesn't repair damaged tissue, but it assists the proteins and fats that do. "Just don't overdo it," cautions Sass. Too much of this potent mineral lowers HDL cholesterol (the good kind) and actually suppresses your immune system. Runners-up: shellfish, sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds

Almonds

Just one ounce of almonds (roughly 20) contains more than 40 percent of your Daily Value of vitamin E, an antioxidant that supports the immune system by neutralizing free radicals. Almonds, like hazelnuts and sunflower seeds, also supply beneficial mono- and polyunsaturated fats, which are key building blocks for healthy cells. "Fat is a structural part of your body, so don't skimp on it, just eat the right kind," says Sass. "Almonds supply heart-healthy fats that promote healing without clogging arteries." Runners-up: nut butters, avocados, vegetable oils

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