

Fruit: Questions and Concerns

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“I know I should eat more fruit. I just don’t do it...”
“I’ve stopped drinking orange juice; too much sugar.”...
“Should I buy organically grown fruit...?”

Some runners wisely devour lots of fruit, believing to be among the healthiest of food choices. But others mistakenly avoid fruit, seeing it as an evil source of sugar and carbs. If you are confused about the role of fruit in your sports diet, keep reading!

Should I eat less fruit to reduce my carb intake?

No! Runners need carbs to fuel their muscles. Despite popular believe, carbs are not fattening. (Excess calories are fattening.) Nor do carbs cause diabetes. (Lack of exercise and excess body weight are two main contributors to diabetes.) Carbs should actually be the foundation of each sports meal and snack.

The carbs in fruit are of two types: sugar and starch. The starch in fruit converts to sugar with ripening. For example:

- a green banana with some yellow is 80% starch and 7% sugar.
- a mostly yellow banana is 25% starch and 65% sugar.
- a spotted and specked banana is 5% starch and 90% sugar.

The sugar in fruit is neither unhealthful nor evil. Unlike refined white sugar, fruit sugar is accompanied by a plethora of health-protective nutrients: vitamin C, folate, potassium, fiber, and phytochemicals that improve healing, aid in recovery after a hard run, and reduce the risk of high blood pressure, cancer and constipation. You should eat more fruit, not try to stay away from it!

Is fruit a smart choice for dieters?

Yes, fruit is a smart choice for everyone. Yet, dieting runners who believe fruit to be “calorie-free” fool only themselves. The average piece of fruit from a grocery store is about 100 calories. Eating four or five pieces of fruit a day can easily add 400 to 500 calories to your intake... healthful calories, but never the less, calories you need to count if weight is an issue.

Are some fruits better than others?

All fruits are good for your health, and some are more nutrient-dense than others. Some of the best fruits include oranges/citrus fruits, bananas, melons, berries, kiwi and mango. When choosing fruit, look for different colors of the rainbow: red berries, orange mango, white banana, yellow pineapple, green kiwi...each color contains different health-protective nutrients.

I’ve heard today’s fruits have less nutritional value...?

While some studies have shown a small decline in a few of the nutrients in today’s produce, the overall picture shows we have a huge abundance of many varieties of fruits from which to choose. By simply eating an additional piece of fruit, we can more than make up for any possible decline in nutritional value.

How much fruit should I eat?

According to the new Food Pyramid (www.mypyramid.gov), you should target at least two cups of fruits per day. (The old Food Pyramid stated “four servings” but, due to confusion about serving size, the new guide now better defines the appropriate intake: two cups). You can easily hit this target at breakfast: simply enjoy cereal with banana (1cup) + 8 ounces (1cup) of orange juice. Voila...baseline fruit-duty done for the day!

Should I buy organically grown fruit?

Organically grown fruits tend to have lower levels of pesticide residues than their conventionally grown counterparts. Be aware some fruits have more pesticides than others (and wash all fruits very well). The safest fruits include banana, mango, papaya, kiwi and pineapple. The fruits highest in pesticides include apples, cherries, imported grapes, nectarines, peaches, pears, raspberries and strawberries. If you can afford to do so, buy organic versions of these high-pesticide fruits. You'll have to pay more- perhaps double for strawberries.

Your best bet is to buy organic fruits in season at the local farmers' markets. By doing so, you will support your local farmers and also pay a reasonable price. Plus, it's nice to meet the people who grow your food.

How can fruit fit into my food budget?

Fresh fruit can be expensive for runners on a budget. That is, if you need 3,000 calories a day, a 300 calorie snack of apples (3 medium-large apples) might cost you about \$2, while 300 calories of carbs from pretzels might cost only \$0.60. Yet, fruit bargains do exist-

- dried fruit. 300 calories (~1/2 cup) of raisins costs about \$0.65. Dried fruits are rich in carbs, fiber and potassium.
- Canned fruit. 300 calories of canned peaches (a 16 oz. can) might cost \$1.30. Rest assured, canned fruits retain most of their nutritional value and are known to be low in pesticides.
- Frozen berries and other fruits. Frozen strawberries are about half the price of fresh ones- and perfect for smoothies
- Bananas. A veritable bargain: 300 calories for about \$0.80. If you hesitate to buy bananas because they tend to “go bad on you” before you get around to eating them, then take note. You can store bananas in the refrigerator: the peel will turn black but the banana will stay fresh and fine. Better yet, peel ripe bananas, cut them into chunks, freeze the individual chunks on a flat tray, and then store them in a zip-lock bag in the freezer. Perfect for bite-size, ice-cream-like snacks or smoothies.

How can I get myself to eat more fruit?

For many runners, breakfast is an appealing time to enjoy fruit; cereal topped with banana or berries is an obvious choice.

- With snacks, some runners fail to choose fruit because it's “not enough.” That is, when you are hungry, 100 calories an apple doesn't satisfy the appetite. The solution is to enjoy protein-fruit combinations: apple + (low fat) cheese, banana + peanut butter, raisins + nuts.
- Think smoothies: Blenderize ½ cup of milk or juice, a banana (frozen chunks for a thick and frosty texture), (frozen) strawberries or whatever fruit is around, plus peanut butter, dry milk (for protein), graham crackers, cinnamon, vanilla...be creative!
- If you like to stock up on snacks that don't spoil, check out the new Tropicana FuitWise bars made from 99% fruit. Handy!

- For a post-exercise refresher, cut up a juicy, potassium rich orange- far healthier than orange-flavored sports drink.
- Serve orange sections at your child's soccer game. Today's kids- as well as adults- need to be brought back to fruit.