

Fueling the Runner: Navigating Nutrition in the New Year

Nutrition goals to help you run your best

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Thoughts of a New Year's resolution are common this time of year. Many aspire to improve family relationships, lose weight, or excel professionally. It is a time where life goals are set for the year. For runners, goal setting is something not limited to the first of the year. Goals and resolutions are identified and conquered all year long.

One ambition that is forever on our minds is a new personal record (PR). A constant cycle gradually develops of breaking a PR, but never feeling quite satisfied until it is broken again. It is this competitive spirit that forever makes our sport so enjoyable. There is a lot that goes into a goal such as a new personal record. Continued effort and modifications in training have to be put forth. Nutrition is one aspect not to overlook in achieving your 2009 running aspirations.

Top Runner's New Year's Nutrition Resolutions:

1) Energy in Equals Energy Out. Runners frequently train in a state of calorie deficit. This usually occurs for one of two reasons. Running is considered a weight control sport. One might feel it necessary to limit the amount of calories in the diet as to achieve a certain look or weight they associate with running faster times. The other reason is related to the high caloric demands of executing an intense training load. It may be difficult to consume the total calories burned over the course of a day. Unless weight loss is deemed appropriate to overall health and training, this year the aim is for a caloric balance. Calories consumed should equal calories burned.

2) Aim for Protein Balance. A runner's diet is frequently filled with high carbohydrate breads, pasta's, and sports bars. On the flip side, popular diets have encouraged a diet rich with a surplus of protein and a reduction of carbohydrates. Some runners are taking to the high protein diet hype by consuming more protein, but eliminating valuable carbohydrates that are required as a primary fuel source. This New Year's resolution should be to determine if you have the right balance of protein. The protein requirements for a runner are about 0.6 - 0.9 grams per pound of body weight per day. Occasionally tally up your total grams of protein for the day to see if you are in your target protein range.

3) Promote Rapid Recovery. Recovery nutrition is something that has been preached for years. It is easy to hear the advice, but the follow through is often lacking. Recovery nutrition is particularly important after the stressor workouts of the week - the tough workouts. By eating carbohydrates with a small source of protein shortly after a workout, the time it takes to recover can be reduced. This allows for you to enter your next workout better prepared.

Does this apply to the start-up or non-competitive runner? Well, maybe not quite as much as the runner who tackles back to back stressor workouts or who may be running more than once a day. However, the philosophy can still be applied to the typical runner without added calories or unwanted weight gain. This type of runner can set a New Year's resolution to try to eat the next main meal within 30 minutes of a stressor workout. The more competitive runner with a higher stress training load will find it beneficial to refuel within 30 minutes of a stressor workout no matter when the workout or mealtime takes place.

4) Increase Phytochemicals. Are you really eating enough fruits and vegetables? Do you find yourself claiming they are too expensive or there is not enough time for preparation so they seem to slip through the cracks at meal time? This is the year to make no more excuses. There is no reason the valuable nutrition provided from antioxidants and other phytochemicals should be lacking from your diet any longer. As a runner you may need up to 3 times more antioxidants than the average person in warding off exercise-induced oxidative stress. Food sources are your best defense. This year, make a goal to incorporate a minimum of five half cup servings of fruits and vegetables into your diet daily.

5) Assess and Reassess Hydration Needs. Answer the question, how much fluid will I need to stay well hydrated? Fluid requirements vary at different times of the year. In the hot summer heat fluid needs will be greater than a 10 degree winter morning. Calculating sweat rate with each change of season can be a wonderful guide as to the approximate amount of fluids needed with training and racing. January is the perfect time to start. Calculate your sweat rate in the winter, spring, summer, and fall to gain a better understanding of how to take adequate fluids with your training and racing. This is a fantastic way to gain confidence in your hydration plan race day morning.

Best wishes for Running Success In 2009!

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