

“Recovery nutrition” has become a bit of a buzz phrase of late, but with all the ads and claims, it can be hard to determine whether it’s important for you. How serious of a runner do you have to be before you focus on executing your own recovery-nutrition practices?

In short, all runners can benefit from recovery-nutrition practices. The important things to know are what to eat when. Let’s take a look at some common scenarios.

### **Eight-Hour Rule**

One of the easiest ways to decide if a post-stressor snack is to your advantage is if you’ll be working out again within the next eight hours. This is most obviously the case if you’re running twice a day. But it’s also important to account for other types of calorie-draining activities, from a weightlifting session or swim to a long hike or even an hour of vigorous yard work.

At the very least, try consuming some type of carbohydrate snack that includes a little protein within 30 minutes after your first workout. By eating something in this “recovery window,” you’ll help reduce muscle damage, you’ll get the process of glycogen replacement going at a high rate, and you’ll be more likely to go into your next run feeling physically fresh and mentally engaged.

### **Eat Enough Carbohydrates**

Say you almost never work out more than once a day and that you almost always have a 24-hour recovery window between workouts. Does this mean recovery nutrition doesn’t apply to you?

No; your body still has a carbohydrate requirement to meet within that 24 hour timeframe to effectively recover. If your preference is a slightly lower-carbohydrate lifestyle, you may find a post-workout, carbohydrate-rich snack is essential.

For example, a lunch consisting of a large salad topped with grilled chicken and vinaigrette dressing, although a healthy choice, is unlikely to meet your carbohydrate goals, particularly after a good stressor workout. On the days you run long or hard, consider either altering your meal and/or consuming a carbohydrate-rich snack soon after you’re done working out. In altering the meal, consider having a smaller salad topped with grilled chicken, dried or fresh fruit, and dressing served with a dinner roll or two and a cup of yogurt. This previously very low-carbohydrate meal has been shifted to providing that carbohydrate punch you’ll need to lessen muscle damage and restore your glycogen supply.

### **Late Run**

It happens to the best of us—schedules make it hard to fit a run in at an otherwise normal hour. So that stressor workout or even a late race didn’t wrap up until 10:00 p.m. Although you may have already eaten dinner and you’re ready to hit the sack, this isn’t the time to go to bed with a stomach half empty.

That long overnight fast will only slow the recovery process. Instead, try to structure the day such that you can still get in adequate carbohydrate and a little protein after the workout. Something as simple as a peanut-butter-topped bagel, glass of chocolate milk, or bowl of cereal would work great. This will help you feel recharged for another day of running, especially if you’re planning to run the next morning.

### **Ward off Indulgences**

Maybe that stressor workout happens to fit into a regular time of day and there’s a nice long recovery window between workouts filled with a sufficient carbohydrate diet. Even so, a light snack or small meal after a workout can still be beneficial. It can help ward off the urge to cave in to the cookie monster in light of a growling stomach leading to overindulgence.

This type of post-workout snacking can be useful in maintaining better control of your diet. It can also still fit into your day without adding unwanted calories. Simply take a side item, such as yogurt you packed for lunch, and save it as a post-workout snack. Even better, structure your day such that the next main meal follows soon after any hard run.

**Basic Rule of Thumb: How Much?**

First and most important, something is better than nothing. Eat some sort of snack that contains carbohydrates. A general rule of thumb is to aim for half your body weight in grams of carbohydrate and 10-20 grams of protein to be eaten within 30 minutes of a hard workout. Even more specifically, a 4:1 ratio of carbohydrate to protein is ideal.

There's more than one way to look at recovery nutrition. Structuring the day such that good nutrition follows those stressor workouts will help in reducing potential muscle damage. It will facilitate the replacement of a depleted glycogen supply and provide the necessary fuel to repair damaged muscle. Who doesn't want an overall faster recovery in pressing on with training?