



## A Newbie's Guide to Sports Nutrition

By Alexis Williams, RD

“Whether your goal is to be healthier, to lose weight or to prevent disease, nutrition and activity go hand in hand in helping you stride forward.”

If 2009 is your year to start running, return to running or to take it to the next level, then, as the Aussies say, “good on ya.” While you're lacing up your shoes to begin your new or revitalized fitness routine, many of you are also thinking more about your food choices. Whether your goal is to be healthier, to lose weight or to prevent disease, nutrition and activity go hand in hand in helping you stride forward.

Sports nutrition is a phrase we use to describe nutrition practices for physically active people. It can include the recreationally active all the way to elite Olympic athletes. For new or renewed run/walkers, it usually means becoming more aware of hydration, timing of meals and food choices that are compatible with activity. For serious run/walkers, it means planning a diet that maximizes performance.

So for the new run/walkers, let's focus on the basics and starting points of sports nutrition with a little Q and A. These are the most common questions asked by participants in my learn-to-run/walk training programs.

### Q: Do I need to eat more if I am run/walking?

**A:** If you are trying to maintain your weight, then you need to consume an extra snack or meal to equal the calories you burn being active. Keep in mind this isn't a ticket for eating whatever you want. Don't overestimate the calories burned during activity. For example, a 150 lb person would burn approximately 275 calories running 5 km at a pace of 8km/hour. This is about the equivalent calories to a small bowl of cereal. If you are trying to lose weight, then you need to add the activity, but not eat additional calories. This would change if you were doing longer distances/durations, but for 30 to 60 minutes of activity you can use this to create a calorie deficit that will help with weight loss. If you want to be accurate, consider using a heart rate monitor that can estimate calories burned for workouts based on the intensity of your exercise.



### About Alexis

Alexis Williams is a registered dietitian focusing on nutrition for active individuals. She counsels amateur and elite individuals across the country and is a regular contributor to the *Running Room Magazine*. As an athlete herself, she understands the challenges of healthy eating and focuses on practical strategies for readers and clients. You can contact her via e-mail [activenutrition4u@yahoo.ca](mailto:activenutrition4u@yahoo.ca)



### Q: How much fluid do I need to drink when run/walking?

**A:** This is HIGHLY variable from person to person. The heavier you are and the more you sweat, the more fluid you lose when exercising. For activity less than 45 minutes, no fluid is really necessary (unless it's extremely hot and humid). For longer distances/duration, it's important to drink up to (but not more than) what you sweat. A way to figure this out is to know your “sweat rate.” For an example of how to calculate your sweat rate, go to [www.runnersworld.com](http://www.runnersworld.com) and search for “sweat rate.” While many books and articles offer blanket guidelines for hydration during activity, it's best to understand your personal needs to prevent both dehydration and over hydration.

### Q: How can I curb my constant hunger?

**A:** If you're aiming to lose weight from being more active, try to eat foods that fill you up. Good examples are fibre and protein-rich foods such as whole grains, lean meats, beans, legumes, low-fat dairy or alternatives, and vegetables and fruits. Try to have a protein and a carbohydrate source with most of your meals and snacks. Make sure if you add in snacks, you reduce the size of your meals to account for the extra calories consumed in your snacks. A post-exercise snack can help curb your hunger after a morning or mid-day workout.

### Q: Do I really need to consume pre- and post-exercise snacks?

**A:** Pre-exercise snacks can be useful if your activity is planned between meals where there is a long gap (like 4 to 6 hours). For example, if you are training in the early evening, you should plan a snack for 1 to 2 hours prior to your workout. Easy-to-digest foods such as oatmeal, cereal, fruits, crackers and bars are good choices. You should consume a post-exercise snack if your next meal is going to be more than two hours away OR if you've exercised for more than 90 minutes and plan to exercise again in a short period of time (i.e., the next day or later the same day). This is not usually the case for beginners, so the post-exercise snack may not be needed. However, as I mentioned previously, one other potential benefit of a post-exercise snack can be satisfying hunger. If you eat some protein and carbohydrates after exercise, it can help curb the ravenous hunger that tends to cause active people to overeat. Just be sure to take into account these calories and reduce meal sizes accordingly.

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### Q: Do I need to use sport drinks, gels and other sport foods?

**A:** Sport foods are convenient, portable and easy-to-digest forms of carbohydrates. They are designed for working muscles and best used during activity or during recovery. For most beginners there is no need to use these foods unless you are exercising longer than 90 minutes or if you are exercising at a very high intensity for shorter time periods (60 to 90 minutes). For many individuals, regular foods (e.g., fruits, pitas, etc.) can be used as an alternative to sport foods for exercise of lower intensity. Remember the cardinal rule of sports nutrition; try it in training.

### Q: What if I can't eat before I run/walk first thing in the morning?

**A:** Start with trying some easily digestible carbohydrate foods like a fruit or piece of toast. If you have tried solid foods and are unsuccessful with being able to digest them before activity, try using a liquid meal option like a fruit smoothie or meal replacement drink. If even this turns your stomach and you're unable to eat or drink anything, try to consume carbohydrates during activity if it's going to last more than 45 minutes. You could also consider sports foods/drinks for this scenario.

### Q: Why am I not losing weight from my new exercise routine?

**A:** There are many potential reasons, but the most common reason is because you are overcompensating for the calories burned during activity with extra food. Having a deluxe hot chocolate could be as much as 500 or more calories, which would negate the calorie deficit created by the activity. Another reason is over consumption because of excessive hunger or cravings for carbohydrate foods. If you're moderately active (i.e., three to four times per week, 30 to 60 minutes), you don't need to eat the standard high carbohydrate diet that is required for more serious endurance athletes. A balanced diet that includes a moderate amount of carbohydrates at two meals and one to two snacks per day (whole grains, fruits, etc.) plus a meal of vegetables and protein is a good idea to help control weight. Protein is very filling and should be a key element in your meals and snacks. Lastly, examine your sources of empty calories such as those from pop, sauces, dressings and condiments and see if you can switch these up for lower calorie options like a lemon and water drink or herbs and spices for food flavouring.

Sport nutrition issues can range from simple to complex. The ideas here speak to the basic questions asked by training program participants. If you are serious about improving your nutrition, I encourage you to seek the assistance of a registered dietitian ([www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca)). If you are a serious athlete and looking for some specialized expertise in sport nutrition, find a registered dietitian specializing in sport by looking under sport nutrition at [www.coach.ca](http://www.coach.ca). 🌱

