



## ASK A NUTRITIONIST

with Tara Postnikoff

**Q:** I'm training to run a marathon and want to lose about 15 pounds. How can I lose weight but not see a drop in my energy levels?

**A:** Training for a marathon and trying to lose weight simultaneously can be a difficult process and is often a contraindicated practice. When training for an event as long as a marathon, you need to be cautious not to reduce your calories below what you need to keep your body functioning properly. Eating too few calories will increase your risk of injury and negatively affect your performance and energy levels. Below are six suggestions for trying to lose weight without compromising your health or your long-distance training.

### 1. Choose quality foods.

Don't count your calories; make your calories count. When trying to lose weight, the first thing I suggest to most people is to look at their diet to see if they are eating enough high-quality, nutrient-dense foods. A great place to start is adding a few additional servings of vegetables to your day. Make sure each meal has at least one cup of vegetables, and if you are meeting that, aim for two to three cups at each meal. Vegetables contain a high amount of vitamins and minerals, which all runners need to support their active lifestyle.

### 2. Don't snack between meals.

Most people are eating too frequently because they think it's a good way to maintain balanced blood sugar. If you are trying to lose weight, you need to allow your body to

get into a fat burning zone by giving yourself four to five hours between meals. Make your main meals large enough to sustain you for this period by ensuring you have a protein source and a healthy fat at each meal. If you aren't used to eating less frequently, you may have to make this adjustment slowly to break the habit.

### 3. Hydrate.

Drinking enough water is essential for an active body. Proper hydration is key to the transport of nutrients throughout the body as well as the elimination of wastes. Water is part of the energy cycle and without it, your body's ability to produce energy will be compromised. Water can help fill you up, so if you are prone to overeating, this can help spare you additional calories. Water is also calorie-free, so if you are used to drinking

fluids containing calories (like coffee, juice or soft drinks), switching to water as your primary beverage will reduce your overall caloric intake.

### 4. Fuel your long runs and intense workouts.

If you are going to cut calories, you shouldn't do it prior to your long runs or high-intensity workouts. You need to fuel your long runs (lasting longer than 90 minutes) with approximately 45 to 75 grams of carbohydrates and 500 to 750 mL of fluids per hour. If you try to run without enough fuel, you will hamper your recovery time, reduce your run quality, increase your risk of injury, raise your cortisol and cause more muscle protein breakdown. You also need to train your body to digest carbohydrates while working at high intensity (race pace),



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so taking in carbohydrates during some of your threshold workouts can be beneficial to your race-day performance. Just make sure that your workouts are falling within two to three hours after your last meal, and that you have something to eat within two hours of completing your workout.

### 5. Reduce your sugar intake.

Foods containing added sugar can quickly increase the calories we are consuming without providing us much (if any) nutrition. The World Health Organization recommends that people should be consuming less than 10% of their total daily calories from sugar. On a 2000-calorie diet, that equates to 200 calories or 50 grams of sugar. This is roughly the amount of sugar in an energy gel or in one and a half cups of flavoured Greek yogurt. Since marathoners need

additional sugar during long runs to maintain energy levels, marathoners looking to lose weight should be very mindful of foods that contain added sugar.

### 6. Get proper rest.

While this is not a nutritional recommendation, sleep should not be overlooked when trying to lose weight. Studies have shown that people who don't get enough sleep tend to eat more the next day in an effort to provide more energy to compensate for the fatigue. When we are tired, we are also at higher risk for making poor nutrition choices and opting for quick fixes like sugar and stimulants such as caffeine. Getting enough sleep (a minimum of seven hours per night) is also key to recovering between workouts so you can keep up with your marathon training plan.

Nutrition should always be considered as part of a balanced training program for endurance athletes. Training for a marathon shouldn't result in the mindset that you can eat whatever you want. In fact, because you are training for such a demanding event, you should prioritize your nutrition plan to support the added stress on your body. **RR**

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