

# Food for Fuel

## Post-race Recovery



IT'S THE DAY BEFORE D-DAY. CONFIDENCE RUSHES THROUGH YOUR VEINS LIKE A WILD FIRE. YOU KNOW YOU HAVE TRAINED FOR THIS DAY LIKE NEVER BEFORE. YOU HAVE PLANNED EVERYTHING DOWN TO THE T, FROM WHAT TO EAT THE NIGHT BEFORE AND HOW MUCH TO DRINK IN THE MORNING TO WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO WEAR FOR THE ULTIMATE RACE OF YOUR LIFE. THIS IS A PICTURE MANY CAN RELATE TO. BUT WHAT HAPPENS AFTER YOU HAVE CONQUERED THE ULTIMATE RACE? DO YOU WALK WITH PRIDE IN YOUR HEART FOR DAYS ON END WHILE YOUR EVERY MUSCLE TWITCHES WITH ACHES AND PAINS? **By Anna Wood**

Knowing how to recover is just as important as knowing how to prepare for a race. In order to understand how we can help our bodies speed up recovery we need to understand what actually happens to your body during a race.

The body stores carbohydrates as a form of glycogen, which is primarily stored in the cells of the liver and the muscles. Unfortunately, our body's ability to store carbohydrates in the

form of glycogen is quite limited. Glycogen forms an energy reserve that can be quickly mobilised to meet a sudden need for glucose during intense exercise, such as a marathon.

After about 60 to 90 minutes of intense exercise your glycogen levels drop dramatically where after you would need to feed extra carbohydrates in the form of sports drinks, gels and other food types to replenish these glycogen levels.

The optimal period for glycogen replenishment is known as the "Glycogen Replenishment Window" which is approximately 2 hours directly after your workout. Within this window your body acts like a sponge (more so in the first 30 minutes) taking up almost as much fuel or food as you can give it to initiate the replenishment of used up muscle and liver glycogen. The sooner you are able to take in these calories, the more glycogen your body will

produce, and the sooner your muscles return to their normal state.

### What should I eat?

You'll want to consume primarily carbs, but don't ignore protein. A good rule of thumb for post-run food is a ratio of 1 gram of protein to 3 grams of carbohydrates.

During the marathon, blood flow was largely shunted away from your stomach to working muscles. So give your digestive system some time to return to its normal working condition by consuming something light and easy to digest directly after your race. This could be something like a nutritional bar, a bread roll with peanut butter or a smoothie made with fruit and yogurt that will help nourish your body and speed up your recovery, not only by providing you with calories but also necessary minerals, antioxidants and enzymes.

If you feel like you can't stomach solid food immediately after a run, try drinking a whey protein shake. It is very convenient to have a shake after a long run to help with muscle recovery. Popular choices such as USN's Whey protein provide plenty of protein and carbohydrates and, once in the body, it breaks down quickly, swiftly sending it's amino to muscle tissue. Whey protein contains peptides (protein fragments) that have been suggested to help increase blood flow to muscles, which is particularly helpful before and after exercise, so that muscles may receive more oxygen, nutrients and hormones right when they need it.

You could even try a sports drink such as USN Spike that will provide you with some vitamins, a bit of protein (please check that protein is included in the ingredients), and some needed calories in the form of carbohydrates that will help your blood sugar levels to return to normal. For your first larger meal, consider replacing lost carbohydrates with whole-grain pasta, basmati rice, whole-grain breads, oatmeal or other foods that are slow to digest.



It is easy to misjudge certain decisions after completing an energy-draining marathon, so making the best choices right after your race won't only affect how you feel when you return to running, but also how you feel at home and at work in the coming week.

As long as you stick to taking in primarily carbohydrates and protein immediately after a hard workout or run within the first two hours, you will be pretty much maximizing your body's recovery in terms of nutrition, while only having a slight advantage by adding proteins.

### Add Electrolytes

Running long distances depletes your body's electrolytes and antioxidants, so replenish them with colorful fruits and fruit juices, such as vitamin-rich berries and potassium-loaded bananas. Sip fluids throughout the day to combat fluid losses, and continue to replenish electrolytes (such as sodium and potassium) by eating small, frequent meals throughout the day.

Many people associate electrolytes with sports drinks and while they

Take care of your body. It's the only place you have to live. - Jim Rohn

provide the sodium and potassium lost in sweat, these bottled drinks provide very little nutritional value and meanwhile your body is craving calories with sustenance. Replenishing lost electrolytes with fresh fruit or fruit juice is far more beneficial and will also provide some carbohydrates. Avoid alcohol and caffeine as they can dehydrate you.

Even the most dedicated runners spend so much time preparing for a marathon that they forget to prepare for their recovery time afterward. In order to avoid injury, improve speed, and increase endurance, it is important to remember that a run doesn't end the moment the shoes come off. 🏃