



Walk to Run
Village Corners Shopping Center
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Eating on the Move – Myths and Facts **by Lynn Gray**

“Increase performance and lose weight quickly”. Myth! The new and “improved” performance enhancers, also known as ergogenic aids, plus countless diet books promise both natural and quick ways of increasing performance and weight loss. The heightened marketing of these performance aids continues to bombard society in our quest to become fit and faster. Many of us remain uncertain as to what to eat before, during, and after our training. The truth is that eating a balanced diet plus exercising regularly will result in both more managing weight and increase performance. Overdoing on performance aids and/or weight loss aids can easily sabotage training progress and how you actually perform in your pinnacle event.

More than forty five years of running has made me learn many truths about foods which promise to heighten athletic performance. Training for and running many marathons before products such as Gatorade and gels were invented have given me insight into what is effective while working out and participating in distance events. Simply put, it was a balanced diet which gave me the energy to perform long distance such as cardio walking and running. Here are a few myths and facts I have learned about eating and hydrating on the “move”.

Myths and Facts of Healthy Performance Based Eating

Myth: Stopping for water does little to build up my stamina and aerobic ability.

Facts: Participants in an active long distance aerobic program who are not properly hydrated will tire earlier with their biomechanical coordination. Performance suffers when a loss of 1 to 2 percent of body weight is lost through sweat and/or not beginning the exercise properly hydrated.

Myth: Drinking coffee acts more like a diuretic when it is used before an aerobic event.

Facts: Caffeine is a central nervous system stimulant and has several advantages for an active aerobic participant. Caffeine will hydrate as well as water, tea, sports drinks, sodas, juices, and water filled foods such as watermelon. Coffee will aid in improving performance as it relates to the increase of speed and power. Generally speaking, about 2-3 cups of coffee or 300-500 mg one hour prior to activity, and 1-3 mg throughout exercise can be effective in decreasing perceived exertion and can increase speed. However, avoid using caffeine in excess or with other stimulants such as alcohol, herbs, and various other energy drinks containing high amounts of caffeine.

Myth: Drinking water before and during exercise causes nausea.

Facts: True and False: Too much water during the run washes out the necessary sodium and potassium which creates a condition called hyponatremia, and too little water during exercise can cause dehydration and limit performance. It is recommended drinking 4 to 8 ounces of water each 10 to 20 minutes of exercise to help replace water lost through perspiring.



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Myth: Carbohydrates cause weight gain and high protein helps with weight loss.

Facts: In all cases of food, eating more than the body burns will create weight gain. However, for the active athlete carbohydrates supply your muscles with glycogen which the body uses as its main source of fuel; giving the energy needed to go for long periods of time. High protein diets subtract water from your tissues, decreases energy sources, and because of the nature of recent high protein diets, limit important nutrients essential to a healthy diet. Nutrients such as grains, cereals, fruits, vegetables, etc. are often eliminated or limited with high protein diets.

Myth: Muscle cramps are caused by lack of salt intake.

Facts: Excess sweating creates muscle cramps and will occur if inadequate water is not taken before, during, and after exercising. Potassium from fruits such as bananas is also helpful in replenishing potassium. High potassium foods include: dried fruit, orange juice, bananas, cantaloupe, tomato sauce, iceberg lettuce, sweet potatoes, green leafy vegetables, white potatoes, yogurt, salmon, barley, milk, fish, and coconut water. During exercising and sweating for an hour or more, a sports drink such as Gatorade mixed with water can prevent muscle cramps. A common misnomer is taking salt tablets, which can aggravate dehydration by subtracting water out of the tissues and into the stomach.

Note: electrolyte replacement pills which can be taken during exercise and are fairly effective in replacing electrolytes are: Thermolyte™, Nuun™, Succeed™. These pills are relevant to those who exercise 5 to 6 hours and should be taken about once an hour.

Myth: Taking vitamin and mineral supplements will provide the athlete with increased health and performance advantages.

Facts: The role of vitamins is to release the energy from the food one eats; there is still not enough evidence to state as a fact that any one of the 14 vitamins provides additional energy for the endurance runner or athlete. Further, all 14 vitamins are found within a balanced eating plan. Many people are fooled with “energy drinks” and pills which promise “increased energy”, and with a slap of the name of a specific vitamin along with other ingredients may entice those who want a more energetic edge. Mega doses or single doses of vitamins and/or minerals do not equate into increased energy since they simply carry no calories.

However, there have been studies which reveal that certain vitamin and mineral supplements may be helpful for some athletes.

- Calcium is important for bone health, muscle and nerve function and blood clotting. Females on a low calorie diet are advised to take supplements as are those who have osteopenia or osteoporosis. Calcium should be taken with Vitamin D for the best effect.
Food sources: dairy, almonds, green leafy vegetables such as broccoli
 - Vitamin D aids in bone and tooth formation plus helps maintain heart action and the nervous system
Food sources: Fortified milk, sunlight, fish, eggs, butter, fortified margarine
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- Iron is important for energy production and red blood cell function. Women runners are usually iron deficient and an active woman is advised to take a ferron test to check their iron levels. The reversal of low iron can take as long as 6 months to correct, but increased performance can be the result.
Food sources: beef, beans, potato, grains, spinach
- B vitamins are important for energy production and muscle recovery. B vitamins are easy to come by with a balanced eating plan; however for vegans or one restricting calories they are difficult to get enough of.
Food sources: brown rice, legumes, whole grains, potatoes, meats and seafood, eggs, oatmeal, green leafy vegetables, dairy, and fruits.
- Magnesium, especially for runners in the South who sweat profusely. Magnesium is important for metabolism of macronutrients, reduces cramping, increases muscle function and helps with anxiety and depression.
Food sources: tofu, wheat germ, cashews, halibut, peanuts, dark chocolate, potato
- Zinc for muscle repair, increased metabolism, and energy production:
Food sources: beef, beans, and nuts
- A basic multivitamin IF you are purposely restricting calories
- Omega 3 fats if fish is not part of your eating plan

Myth: Taking additional antioxidants greatly increases inflammation and reduces muscle soreness.

Facts: Antioxidants are compounds capable of slowing or preventing the [oxidation](#) of other molecules. The training done in running and walking actually produces and enhances antioxidants; too much can actually diminish the body's natural antioxidants. As athletes increase quality food to their diets due to increased exercise, increased antioxidants become available. An excess of antioxidants can become less oxidative and may have negative consequences. Eating 9 – 10 portions of fruit and/or vegetables per day gives you the antioxidants needed to remain healthy.

Myth: Natural products such as ginseng enhance exercise endurance.

Facts: Animal studies are promising but human studies show no ergogenic effect. Ginseng is safe to use but more research is needed on endurance athletes as to whether it is beneficial or not. Coconut water promises to be an effective fluid replacement being low in sodium and high in potassium. However GI issues are possible for the runner and more research is needed to prove any benefits.

Myth: Low calorie diets are the fastest, most effective way to lose weight.

Facts: Fasting, high protein diets, low calories diets definitely will result in large amounts of weight loss. However it is with the sacrifice of muscle mass, glycogen stores (energy), water and not body fat that is lost. Thus endurance athletes lose their edge in performance as a result of most diets which restrict normal food groups in any way. Furthermore, many extreme diets



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result in electrolyte imbalances, iron and calcium deficiencies, not to mention vital minerals and vitamins.

Myth: Many nutritional “all natural” supplements and performance aids are effective in weight loss and enhancing performance.

Facts: As mentioned before, not enough research has been done on humans to definitely prove their effectiveness. Deceptive marketing plus misleading and fraudulent advertising are responsible for many athletic participants to try out these products. Also the FDA has not reviewed, tested or approved many of these performance aids with regard to their safety and effectiveness. Remember, many times these supplements and performance products refer to research done for proof of their effectiveness...however, it is usually with animal studies.

Myth: Most low-fat foods are also low in calories.

Facts: Most foods which are naturally low in fat such as fruits and vegetables are low in calories. Once food is dubbed “low-fat” the actual process of removing the fat which then removes a bit of taste and texture leaves the food tasting quite bland. Thus through the manufactured process of putting taste and texture back into those now “low fat” foods often result in added carbohydrates and protein, and/or added sugar or salt. The resulting low fat version food may not be as naturally healthy for you vitamin/mineral wise and may in fact become more caloric.

Tips for “eating on the move”

- **Timing** of your food choices: breakfast, mid-morning snack, lunch, mid-evening snack, evening meal, last night snack
 - **Carb loading proportions** for distance walkers and runners before an event or workout: Carbohydrate – 70%, Protein – 15%, Fats – 15%
 - **Timing of fuel:** **Pre-run meal** – low fiber & lactose free-1 hr. example: half of bagel with a small amount of peanut butter
large meal-4-6 hrs
small meal-2-3 hrs
liquid meal-1-2 hrs
during event or long workout: gels with water intake, small pieces of an energy bar, Gatorade mixed with water after an hour or so, especially if it is over seventy degrees with high humidity
 - **Prepare to sweat:** once dehydrated, all rules of sports nutrition do not work, hyponatremia-too much water which dilutes the salt-nausea and dizziness occur. Women have less sweat glands than men...sweating is your air conditioning, 2 liters of water is lost per hour on a hot day.
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- **Refueling time:** Refuel with carbohydrate & protein within 15 minutes of completion the workout or event; have a ratio of 4:1 protein and carbs (ex-chocolate milk), continue to hydrate throughout the day...think of your run as a deep tissue massage which like running, stirs up lots of waste products
- **How much sugar?** Use food with a low glycemic index which will then dictate how fast sugar gets into your system and how stable your sugar level will be. When your sugar drops to low due to lack of carbs or fuel, you stop burning fat which is another fuel source you need for and during long distance swimming, biking, walking, and/or running. Concentrate on fruits and protein such as yogurt or a protein/fruit shake after a workout.

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