

Corewell Health Medical Group Orthopedic Tips



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Fueling Strategies for Race Day

Race week is finally here! You've logged the miles and adhered to your training plan. Now, it's time to think about your fueling strategy. Making the right choices can lead to success, while lacking a plan can be disastrous. Here's a quick-reference guide to help you prepare for peak performance on race day.

For exercise lasting 90 minutes or longer (I am talking to you 25k runners!), we want to practice "carbohydrate loading" in the 1-2 days leading up to the race. This practice fills your muscles' carbohydrate stores up to the brim, allowing for the appropriate energy to be available for your race. This practice helps prevent "hitting the wall," the point at which your body switches from primarily burning carbohydrate for energy to burning fat, which is much more metabolically costly and inefficient. In order to adequately carb load, you should consume ~5 grams of carbohydrate per pound of body weight per day in the 1-2 days prior to the event. This would equate to 750g of carbs for a 150lb woman. Easily digestible, high carbohydrate foods include pasta, bread, white rice, potatoes, oats and bananas. Note this practice does not entail eating extra calories above your daily needs, but rather temporarily replacing other macronutrients (protein, fat) with carbohydrate. For races shorter than 90 minutes, carbohydrate loading is generally unnecessary.

On race day, meals should be familiar and easy to digest. Gastrointestinal upset can already be a problem for runners. Trying a new gel or sports drink on race day can end poorly. A low fiber, carbohydrate rich breakfast and pre-race snack can help tank you up for success, for both short and long distance races. Consuming a meal with 0.5-1g of CHO per pound of bodyweight 2-4 hours prior to the race and a snack with 20-30g of CHO (think energy gel or banana) 15-30 minutes prior to the race are recommended. This allows for glucose to be readily available during the event to maximize performance. For our longer distance runners (25k), some calories should be consumed during the race to optimize performance (30-60g of carbohydrate per hour, typically in the form of a gel or sports drink). For shorter distances (5-10k), this is not needed.

Good luck on 5/9. I look forward to seeing you cross that finish line and crush your goals!

If you have any questions or concerns regarding an injury or pain, please reach out to one of our experienced sports medicine physicians at Corewell Health West Orthopedics at (616) 267-8860. You can find more information about our orthopedic programs and providers near you at corewellhealth.org.
