



HIGH PERFORMANCE

SPORTS MEDICINE

Post-Race Nutrition: Adaptation and Healing

Congratulations, you have crossed the finish-line, but it is only May and this is not likely where your racing season ends. Whether you are running the 5K or half marathon, this race is part of the foundation you are laying for a successful, and hopefully injury-free, running season! Post-race nutrition is an important element of your ongoing training as it facilitates both adaptation to stress and the healing of tissues.

The purpose of your pre-race training was to gradually teach your body how to adapt to the stress you wish to place upon it. Exercise stresses your body and signals it to get stronger. Nutrition is the means by which this adaptation occurs. Poor nutrition will hinder the process and hence your performance.

Those of you participating in longer distance races, a half marathon and above, require even greater attention to nutrition as the trauma accumulated by your body goes beyond its cue to adapt. In fact, most long distance racers will run beyond their limits on race day and some will develop an injury as a result. Appropriate post-race nutrition will expedite your recovery and the healing of any acquired injuries.

The following recommendations have your health and performance in mind:

1. Rehydrate. That's common sense, but here's how to take it to the next level - don't eat until you are fully hydrated! If you eat food too early after prolonged exercise, you will interfere with your body's rehydration process and can experience lethargy, headaches, cramps, and/or constipation. So, after your race take about 30 minutes to drink up to 2-3 litres of fluid without food. Ideally this should consist of watered down juice with a tablespoon of protein powder. Do not drink straight water.
2. Juice is recommended because it will prevent your body from breaking down muscle tissue for energy, which it is prone to do after a long run. Instead you will burn fat and use the sugar contained in the juice, which also contains important vitamins and electrolyte salts that have been depleted.

3. The protein powder in your watered-down juice will prevent your body from breaking itself down and provide essential materials needed to aid in the repair of injured tissues. Protein powder is ideal at this time, as opposed to food, because it is easily absorbed and won't disrupt your rehydration.
4. You can stop drinking once you have urinated twice. Now it's time to eat something.
5. Physically speaking, your body needs a meal that looks like a traditional dinner or stir-fry. 1-2 fists of carbs (e.g. potatoes or rice), 1 fist of protein (e.g. fish or chicken), 2 fists of light colourful vegetables (e.g. red peppers, spinach, and carrots), and 1-2 thumbs of healthy fats (e.g. nuts, olive oil, or pumpkin seeds).
6. Emotionally speaking, many competitors enjoy a feast of comfort foods after a big event. If you are going to indulge in treats and excess calories, after a race is the time to do it. You are metabolically "bulletproof" and even a very large meal is simply going to be absorbed as glucose and new tissue, and not become fat.
7. Have 1 tablespoon of fish oil as part of your post-race meal, or just eat a cold-water fish like salmon. These foods provide essential fats that our body can't make. They moderate inflammation which you will be experiencing to a high degree.
8. Listen to your appetite. It will tell you to eat more food when you need it after the race. It will return to normal 1-2 days after the race.

Kyle Byron is a Nutritionist who uses industry leading methods to change how his clients eat by combining the science of food with the psychology of habit setting and motivation. To find out if Nutrition coaching might help you meet your health and exercise goals, book a meeting with Kyle, free of charge, by email at hello@hpsm.ca or kyle.byron@hpsm.ca, or by phone at 416-486-HPSM (4776). High Performance Sports Medicine is conveniently located at the Yonge Eglinton Centre, 2300 Yonge Street, Suite 1604. For more information regarding our clinic services and our approach to treatment please visit www.hpsm.ca.