

Marie Murphy Health & Fitness

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Nutritional Guidelines 7 Days before Running a Marathon

Keep focused on your fitness programme

Your physical fitness at this moment is the sum of your training and nutrition practices over the five to six months leading up to this event. Do your best to stay with these inputs to which your body already adapted.

Consume lots of fluids

Concentrate on consuming adequate fluids. Staying hydrated before, during and after your training sessions will compensate for any sweat lost and will conserve your energy. Marathon hydration is essential, especially the three days before competition (e.g. 2-3 liters a day).

Do not experiment with new foods

Stay with foods that you are familiar with; if it has not been part of your regular daily nutrition chances are it will do more harm than good. The basics; fruits, vegetables and grains can be purchased in almost any city.

Increase carbohydrate intake

While the volume and intensity of your training will decrease over the final week, your intake of carbohydrates and fluids should increase. Proteins, fats, vitamins and minerals should also be included to balance your daily caloric intake. Be careful with fibre intake (e.g. bran, citrus fruits, and legumes).

Achieve high muscle and liver glycogen

By tapering training over the next 5-7 days and consuming a high intake of carbohydrates, you can achieve a high muscle and liver glycogen content at the time of your marathon. Fuel your muscles to go the distance.

Extra carbohydrates and water on plane

During your flight, concentrate on extra fluids and carbohydrates for easy digestion while traveling. (Flight altitude can cause dehydration and/or constipation). Suggestion; pre-order your meals before the flight or bring along your desired foods with you.

Small but frequent meals

Time zone changes can interfere with sleep and appetite. Small but frequent meals (every 3-4 hours) will keep muscle glycogen stores fuelled and maintain adequate carbohydrates and energy intake. A little a lot is better than a lot a little.

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Extra rest

Extra rest and a high carbohydrate intake over the final 3-4 days will enhance performance. Taking a couple of days off before the race will benefit you greatly. A good night's sleep, two nights before the race is key!

Limit Alcohol

Alcohol intake can have a negative effect on performance and should be reduced or eliminated altogether in the week leading up to competition.

Night before: high carbohydrates

A high carbohydrate diet (e.g. pasta, potatoes, rice, noodles, breads, cereals, juices) in combination with rest the day before your marathon can lead to high muscle glycogen levels and enhance your performance.

Low glycaemic carbohydrates at breakfast

Overnight fast (sleeping) reduces liver glycogen. Carbohydrates with low or moderate ratings on the glycaemic index (GI) are the preferred type of carbohydrate for consumption 3-5 hours before your marathon (e.g. oatmeal, porridge, banana, orange juice, grapes, whole meal bread, yogurt).

Do not experiment with carbs during the race

You may want to ingest a carbohydrate rich drink during your event. Keep in mind this should already be part of your training practices. Race day is not the time to try something new.

Drink right before marathon

Close to your marathon start time (15-20mins), you can drink 300-400ml (2 cups) of fluid.

Just enough fluids during race

Keeping a comfortable volume of fluids in your stomach before, during, and after your marathon is essential to performance and recovery. Don't pass up on any early water stations, especially the first 6 miles; you cannot make up for it in the later stages of your race.

Pace your nutrition

Just as your marathon is all about pace to maximize energy output so too is your nutrition - avoid over or under nourishment. Your body loses energy by trying to compensate for the imbalance.

Preparation is the key to success. Have a great marathon!