

Why Runners Shouldn't Diet (And What To Do Instead)

<https://www.yahoo.com/health/why-runners-shouldnt-diet-and-what-to-do-110004536748.html>

Runners have a reputation for being exceptional eaters. We've been known to out-eat our bigger, heavier friends while they look on in amazement (and, sometimes, in terror). And we've all been on the receiving end of well-intentioned comments like, "Are you really going to eat *"all of that?"* as we scarf down food after a long run.

For distance fiends trying to shed pounds, *runger* can make weight loss difficult — but it's not impossible. All you need is a smart approach that will help you balance your running schedule with your weight loss goals. Unfortunately, many runners combine a standard calorie-restriction diet with race training, hoping their high mileage and limited food intake will blast off pounds. More often, this results in sub-par performances, feelings of sluggishness and poor weight loss results.



"If you diet while training, you won't perform at your best because your body won't be able to adequately repair your muscles after workouts," says Anne Mauney, MPH, RD, and the author of the food and fitness blog fANNEtastic food. The consequences aren't just limited to feeling sore and tired, either. Mauney says, "If taken too far, under-fueling while training can lead to more serious issues like stress fractures or passing out during runs due to electrolyte imbalances."

The solution? Implementing a short-term weight loss phase *before* your normal training cycle begins. During this period, you should be focusing on weight loss, and running for cardio, not performance. While there are a lot of different diet strategies, these three are the best for runners during this weight loss cycle.

1. Focus on Nutrient-Dense Foods

Certain foods will help you better manage your hunger after runs. A landmark study from the *Nutrition Journal* found that a nutrient-dense diet lessens the experience of hunger, and thus, is an effective tool not only for improving your health, but for weight loss, too. In other words, a protein-packed quinoa bowl will probably fill you up more than cheese fries.

Naturally, the best foods to eat during your weight loss phase will be high in nutrients, while also being relatively low in calories. Focus on eating foods like vegetables, fruit, legumes and grains for the bulk of your pre-season running diet. Mauney says that healthy fats can also be great for satiety.

If you know you always feel ravenous after workouts, plan what you're going to eat before you even leave for a run. This strategy will help you avoid any last-minute decisions resulting from those "must eat" survival mechanisms that tell you to dial for pizza, pronto. Having food that's ready and waiting for you, or already prepped, is the best way to go.

2. Don't Drink Your Calories

Water should be everyone's beverage of choice, for a whole host of reasons. And for the athlete trying to lose weight, one of the biggest perks is that it contains zero calories.

While sports drinks are helpful immediately before, during, or after a strenuous workout, they contain too much sugar to consume regularly. Instead, choose water during most of the day and to hydrate for easier runs.

Several Harvard University studies have connected the consumption of calorie-containing beverages with obesity. One study showed that people who drank their calories didn't feel as full as those who ate them from food.

If you're trying to lose weight, drink water at least 90 percent of the time, and stick to unsweetened tea, coffee or other unsweetened beverages when you want to mix things up.

3. Protein, Protein, Protein

Eat protein with every meal, especially at breakfast. Research has confirmed again and again that eating protein increases your feelings of satiety. Not only will you feel fuller, longer, but you'll probably eat a little less, too. So make protein a priority, especially at breakfast, which will help reduce cravings later in the day.

Mauney agrees that protein is critical for runners. "Your body needs protein to repair and build muscle tissue after a challenging workout. It is an important building block of bones, muscles, cartilage, skin, and even blood, and you need it to make enzymes and hormones, too."

Some of the best sources of protein are wild fish, free-range poultry, and lean meats, or plant sources like legumes, nuts, and seeds. Or, mix up a smoothie with protein powder for a filling milkshake-like treat. Most runners should aim to consume about .5 to 1 gram of protein per pound of body weight per day, depending on how many miles they're logging.

The Final Word on Running for Weight Loss

Maybe you've heard that 95 percent of people fail at their diets. But perhaps we should shift the blame and consider that 95 percent of all *diets* fail. That's a critical distinction.

Dieting can be risky for runners. Restricting calories — or avoiding an entire macronutrient, like carbohydrates — is a mistake when you're training hard.

But if you focus on eating on minimally processed, nutrient-dense foods that are high in protein and fiber, it will be difficult to gain weight while running. In fact, many people find that by mainly eating meat and vegetables, and drinking water almost exclusively, they're able to lose weight without having to count calories or "diet" at all.

If you do want to focus on weight loss, do so before you start a serious training program. Integrate some of these healthy eating habits into your pre-season program, and you may just find that you're not only lighter, but also *faster*, when you're ready to take your training up a notch.