

Fueling the Runner: Benefits of Food Logs

A natural extension of the training log

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It's amazing how quickly our time is stripped away while we respond to multiple e-mail accounts, Facebook, Twittering, even updating workouts on the electronic running log. No wonder we have a hard time going a day without a run. Between tracking deadlines, the racing calendar, and daily responsibilities, time on the track or road can quickly wash any worries away.

It's surprising we can keep life, let alone eating habits, straight. To avoid what can feel like chaos in my life, I can't get through a day without jotting little notes. There is the to-do list, the grocery list, maybe even a little note on the workouts completed before they make their way into the running log. The good news is there is an uncomplicated way to ward off poor eating habits and keeping that fit physique in an otherwise complex world. The little notes that help manage the day can also help manage your training diet.

Nutrition notes can be done on a loose sheet of paper, or you can make a formal version in which you have headers like breakfast, lunch, and snacks. Then simply jot down what you have to eat and drink during the day. This can be done any time of day. The important thing is to get it down in a written format.

You might consider nutrition notes to be another hassle for your already-demanding agenda, but it's just the opposite. Nutrition notes can help provide a greater sense of control and confidence about your diet. It has been proven that documenting what you eat and drink makes it easier to keep track of your diet. It allows greater recognition of areas needing improvement. It will also help identify food patterns. Do you starve yourself the first half of the day and eat everything in sight come evening? Writing it down will help avoid this common pitfall.

Think of what you want to accomplish. Do you want to add more quality to your diet, such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables? Are you trying to minimize energy lows on the afternoon run? Lose 10 pounds by the fall season? Reflecting on a midday nutrition log or note will help you accomplish such goals. The first half of the day may reveal low carbohydrate consumption or a lack of fruits and vegetables for the day; then, the evening meal or following day can be adjusted accordingly.

The Best Policy

One important factor to address is honesty. Honesty is required in documenting what you eat and drink. Are portions on the large or small side? Are you suppressing hunger pains much more often than you're willing to admit? Don't forget the multiple occasions you passed the candy bowl grabbing a few M & M's. All these things can add up to either too few or too many calories.

That late-evening energy drink may have worked great to get you through writing that paper, but it might not prove useful when it comes time to getting a full night of recovery sleep. Sure, tracking what you eat can be great for your overall health and keeping the scale in check, but this is a strategy that can also be utilized specific to training and racing. Noting how a switch to a regular-strength caffeinated beverage pans out may be valuable information in getting that full night of sleep your body needs to effectively recover from training.

We all know runners who eat the same thing before every race. Tracking what is eaten before a big workout or race can be a huge confidence builder. Confidence in the meal consumed is one reason why so many runners eat the same foods before competition. Because it worked, right? "Maybe what I ate helped fuel me to that personal record?"

Pitfalls in the diet can be minimized by keeping better track of what you're eating. Whether it's done daily or 3 times a week, your nutrition notes add structure to your overall diet just like keeping a to-do list on the calendar keeps your daily responsibilities in task. Eat smart, run fast.

The complete archives of Jackie's Fueling the Runner series can be found at runningtimes.com/fuel . Jackie is a registered dietitian.

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