

45 Best Foods for Runners

Grains: More Filling, Tastes Great

1.Oatmeal : A serving of oats gives you plenty of carbohydrate and has a low glycemic index, providing sustained release of energy into the bloodstream, important for runners. Oatmeal is excellent for breakfast or an anytime meal. Add skim milk and sweeten with dried fruit like bananas or apricots for a nutritional bounty. Instant oatmeal offers much the same benefits as rolled oats. Avoid pre-sweetened brands which have high sugar content. Oatmeal also helps lower cholesterol in your body.

2.Dark bread : Breads dark in color like pumpernickel and rye have more fiber and whole grain than lighter breads. This holds true for bagels--go for dark choices.

3.Quinoa : This product is similar to rice but more delicate and flavorful and cooks in half the time. "It's a great alternative," says Chris Rosenbloom, Ph.D, associate professor of nutrition at Georgia State University in Atlanta. "It's a newer grain, providing a carbo-boost in place of rice or pasta." A 6-ounce serving of quinoa contains 132 calories, 23 grams of carbohydrate, 4 grams of protein and 2 grams of unsaturated fat.

4.Buckwheat pasta : Also known as soba noodles, they are a more whole grain noodle and higher in carbos than regular pasta. Add to soup or use in a veggie stir fry, suggests Rosenbloom.

5.Whole wheat pasta : This pasta has a heartier flavor and more whole grain and about three times the fiber as regular pasta. To boost your fiber intake and enjoy more textured flavor, combine whole wheat with regular pasta All pasta raises your blood sugar level while maintaining it for a long time, making it essential fuel for all the miles you put in.

6.Regular pasta : Basic, no-frills noodles with marinara or meat sauce is excellent; for a lighter sauce, go for garlic and parmesan. It's the portion size that causes trouble. For runners, up to 6 ounces of pasta (a standard package is 16 ounces) is plenty. Restaurants tend to supersize pasta dishes; if so, take home a doggy bag.

Fish: Sensational Salmon

7.Shrimp : Don't worry about the high cholesterol content. It's cholesterol from plant origins that are not well absorbed by the body, says Rosenbloom. Shrimp is high in muscle-building protein and low in saturated fat. Have your shrimp boiled or in a stir fry with pasta for a complete meal.

8.Crab : Like shrimp, it is rich in protein and has a benign form of cholesterol that is not readily absorbed. Have crab meat or claws. Crabcakes are an excellent dinner selection when you're eating out.

9.Salmon : Every dietitian's favorite, salmon is a PR food that should be eaten regularly and can be enjoyed in numerous ways: salmon steaks or filets, baked or grilled, in pasta or salads, as sandwiches or burgers, chowder or gumbo. Even canned salmon is good for you, advises *Runner's World* nutrition columnist Liz Applegate of Davis, California. "You obtain calcium from the small bones. I tell people who are too busy to cook to get canned salmon for salads, sandwiches and chowder." While salmon is an excellent protein source, the big bonus is omega-3 fats, which contribute to healthy cell membranes and are associated with reduced risk of heart disease.

10.Mackerel : Like salmon, mackerel is an excellent fish with omega-3 fats.

11.Sardines : Also has omega-3 fats and is versatile for salads and sandwiches.

12.Cod : "For people who are not fish eaters," says Rosenbloom, "cod is mild, not as strongly flavored." Cod is high in protein and low in fat. And it's easy to make. Take out a frozen filet. Add cornmeal batter for flavor.

13.Tuna : Treat yourself to the handy, portable tuna that now comes in pouches where you find canned tuna. You don't have to drain it. Pouch tuna is a quick protein meal. It tastes fresher than canned tuna, say the experts, and has omega-3 fats. When you're on the go, grab a tuna pouch, pita bread and some veggies and you've got a quick, nutritious lunch.

Fruit: Refreshing Fuel

14.Bananas : They're wrapped and convenient. They're versatile and ideal with cereal. Bananas have carbs and potassium, which runners lose through sweating and help regulate muscle contraction. "And when bananas are rotten," suggests Nancy Clark, author of *The Sports Nutrition Guidebook*, "cut them into chunks, put in the freezer, then blend with skim milk. It tastes like banana ice cream-you'd think it was Haagen Daz."

15.Oranges : One orange gives you all the vitamin C you need for a day. If peeling one is too messy for you, cut in sections and throw into a baggy for post-workout. Vitamin C helps heal the "micro-injuries" you get on every run. Orange juice (8 oz.) also does the job but an orange is better.

16.Strawberries : Have them fresh or frozen depending on the season. Rich in vitamin C, low in calories, taste great. Versatile as snacks, with cereal, on salad. Use frozen berries to make delicious, nutrient-rich smoothies.

17.Canteloupe : Half a melon provides a day's worth of vitamin C. Melons are filling; just 100 calories will satisfy you. Melons are rich in beta-carotene, an anti-oxidant vitamin associated with lower risk of heart disease and cancer. Great post-run snack or, with cottage cheese, a light lunch.

18.Mangoes : Plenty of vitamin A and beta-carotene.

19.Kiwi : Supplies vitamin C and potassium. Low in calories.

20.Fruit kabob : Put a row of fruit, fresh or canned, on a skewer and have with a non-fat plain yogurt dip, suggests dietitian Lisa Dorfman of Miami, author of *Vegetarian Sports Nutrition Guide* . Add naturally-sweetened jam for additional flavor.

Vegetables: Bean Bonanza

21.Beans : The consensus favorite, beans are the salmon of the veggie world. Cooked dry beans like pinto, lentil, garbonzo and split pea are high in protein and fiber, a plant source of iron and low in fat. Beans are a great accompaniment to soup and stew. Rice-and-beans is a complete meal with carbos and protein.

22.Baby Carrots : The same multitude of benefits as regular carrots-vitamin A, fiber, low-fat and beta-carotene-but with the convenience of a handy snack, says Alysun Deckert, of the food and nutrition department at the University of Washington Medical Center in Seattle.

23.Broccoli : While Pres. Bush I was known for his avoidance of this vitamin-enriched food, Pres. Bush II the runner would certainly benefit from broccoli's potassium content after one of his 5-k efforts. Steam your broccoli or sauté in garlic and oil (but make sure it's still crunchy indicating the nutrient content is not lost).

24.Cauliflower: For time-saving convenience, get ready-to-eat bags of cauliflower, and also broccoli, and munch raw as snacks or add to salads.

25.Asparagus: As with broccoli and cauliflower, munch asparagus raw as a snack, add to salads or steam for a source of vitamin A and potassium.

26.Lettuce : Dark-leaf lettuce has vitamin C, vitamin A, fiber and iron.

27.Sweet potato : Though potatoes are technically a starch, they are permitted into the veggie family on a waiver. The orangey sweet potatoes have carbos and vitamin A and with toppings are big enough to be a meal unto itself, says Ellen Coleman, author of *Eating For Endurance* and nutritional consultant for The Sports Clinic in Riverside, California. As the name says, these potatoes are sweet; add a pinch of margarine or butter and you're good to go.

Dairy: Get a Milk Moustache

28.Skim milk : Provides protein, carbos, calcium and potassium. Milk protein is absorbed well, says Penn State dietitian Christine Clark, adding, "No one over the age of 2 needs anything but skim."

29.Low-fat yogurt : Any kind, plain or with fruit, provides calcium, protein, carbos. Grab-and-go food.

30.Low-fat cheeses . Versatile choices like provolone, mozzarella and feta cheese are excellent for salads, sandwiches and snacking. Provides protein and carbs.

31.Frozen yogurt : Great fruity dessert or instead you can have lower-fat ice cream, within limits. (Normal ice cream portion size is a cup-and-a-half. Sorry, you can't eat the whole container.)

32.Milk-based soups : Add skim-milk to soup, advises Christine Clark, to increase protein intake. Excellent for broccoli and tomato soup. These soups are considered "volumetric"-they fill you up on fewer calories.

Meat/Fowl: Darker is Better

33.Lean roast beef: With an abundance of vitamin B, iron and zinc (which aids in healing), lean roast beef is the most nutrient-dense red meat, says Nancy Clark. As in bread and lettuce, the darker the meat, the more nutrients it contains (and the added iron is especially important for women). Have a roast beef sandwich (dark bread, of course) for a power-packed lunch.

34.Top round ground beef : The top cuts of beef and sirloin are leanest and provide needed protein. Have as part of a meal-an accompaniment-for portion control. Add to a stir fry or burrito, says iz Applegate.

35.Chicken : Have baked, grilled, or broiled but not fried. Lean protein but not as much iron as red meat.

36.Turkey : Similar to chicken. Have turkey sandwiches with tomato and dark-leaf lettuce for a nutrient-dense lunch.

37.Lamb : You'll get protein, iron and zinc in roast lamb but make sure you trim away the fat after cooking.

Protein Alternatives: Go Nuts

38.Soy milk : It's fortified with calcium and vitamin E. Also for those who are lactose intolerant.

39.Tofu : Made of soybean curd, tofu contains protein, important for bone health and neuromuscular function, says Samantha Heller, Ph.D, senior clinical nutritionist at New York University Medical Center, and an exercise physiologist. Get ready-made soy burgers, suggests Applegate, and crumble into pasta sauce. One patty has about 70 calories and no fat and plenty of potassium along with protein. Tofu is rich in phytochemicals associated with reduced risk of heart disease and cancer.

40. Nuts : Have nuts, like almonds or walnuts, several times a week, urges Applegate. Nuts contain heart-healthy fat. Add to dried fruit like cranberries for a mini-trail mix.

41. Peanut butter : Get the natural kind with oil on the top and no added ingredients. Though high in fat (about 16 grams per serving), it's the good fat and there's no cholesterol. Peanut butter on whole grain or multi-grain bread makes a great breakfast, says Heller.

Snacks: The 200 Calorie Dessert

42. Rice crackers : Crunchy, thin, digested well, give you energy, says Dorfman.

43. Organic brownie : Not as tasty as the real kind but only about 1 gram of saturated fat per serving and you get a good amount of carbs.

44. Baked chips : If chips are baked, not fried, there are only 110 calories per 1-ounce serving and no saturated fat. We said *one* serving.

45. Chocolate : "I eat chocolate every day," says Applegate. "Everyone is allowed up to 200 calories of their favorite treat daily." For example, 55 M&Ms, 20 peanut M&Ms or one Hostess cupcake (180 calories, which means you can also have 5 M&Ms).

Sidebar One: Quick Bites

*The darker the color of certain foods, like red meat, bread and lettuce, the more nutrients it contains.

*A healthy diet may include 2 to 4 portions of lean red meat per week.

*Red meat has roughly the same amount of cholesterol as in chicken or fish. Choose lean cuts to reduce *fat* content.

*Use the 80-20 approach to healthy eating: If 80 percent of your diet is nutrient-dense (a lot of nutrients per number of calories), then 20 percent can be lower in nutrient amounts.

*Studies show that eating fish one a week can reduce heart attack risk by about one-third.

*Protein is more important for runners than once believed. A 118-pound runner should take in 64 to 86 grams of protein per day.

*Apples are good for you but many other fruits have more nutrients. Says Nancy Clark, "An orange a day helps keep the doctor away."

Sidebar Two: Nutritional No-Nos

*Pre-sweetened cereals: few nutrients and too much sugar.

*Fish-and-chips: high in fat and wastes your fish choice.

*Pure cream like whipped cream or sour cream (so have your baked potato with salt, pepper and parmesan): too much fat.

*Spare ribs: high in saturated fat.

*Iceberg lettuce: little nutritional value compared to other lettuce.

Sidebar Three: Steps To Improve Your Diet

Madelyn Fernstrom, Ph.D, director of the Weight Management Center at the UPMC Health System in Pittsburgh, suggests the following steps to improve your diet:

*Make small dietary changes because they'll last. Radical changes don't.

*Have 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Any combination is okay. Canned fruit is acceptable. Choose foods of many colors: orange, green, red. A cup of salad counts as one vegetable. Corn, peas and potatoes are "starchy carbs" and don't count. You don't need enormous variety and don't have to like everything.

*Go to the market once a week and buy produce that's not going to rot quickly so they will be convenient to eat all week long. Keep a bag of apples in your place of work.

*Consider portable food like liquid protein shakes and energy bars when you're on the go. It's better than skipping a meal. Don't rely on fruit alone as a meal because you'll go hungry.

*Think before you eat. Avoid mindless eating. Acknowledge that you can choose to eat certain foods and not others. One study showed that the more food put in front of you, the more you eat. Don't eat "just because it's there."