

RUNNING SHORTS

Give your body enough fuel for the long run ahead

By Ken Johnson

Now that cooler weather is here, many of us are doing longer training runs and longer races. As we increase our distance, it is important that we fuel our bodies accordingly.

During the hot Texas summers, most races are 5K's (3.1 miles). What is most important for this relatively shorter distance is hydration. We have to make sure our body has sufficient fluids to avoid overheating. What we eat the day before the race or the morning of the race is not so important.

However, for long runs, what we eat in the days before the races becomes more important. The traditional meal the night before a marathon (26.2 miles) is pasta, which is high in carbohydrates. When properly trained, the body can store enough carbohydrates to run about 20 miles. Marathon runners complain of "hitting a wall" at 20 miles. That is because the body runs out of fuel at this distance and you have to "gut it out" for the remaining 6.2 miles. Luckily, nowadays we have "gels." Gels are small packets of concentrated carbohydrates. Each packet provides sufficient carbohydrates to run for an hour. Popular brands include GU and Power Gel. Some runners carry them in pouches when they run long distances and in many marathons, they are provided at aid stations along the course.

You do not need gels for 10K's (6.2 miles) or shorter races; your body should already have enough carbohydrates stored to run those distances. While gels are helpful for long distances, it is still important that you eat balanced meals in the days before running long distances.

Hydration is critical during long distance runs, even in the cooler months. For years, the experts recommended that we consume plenty of water during a marathon. Recent studies have found that drinking too much water during a marathon dilutes the sodium level in the body and can result in a condition called "hyponatremia." This can be more serious than dehydration. Experts now say that you should drink when you are thirsty and not so much that you increase your body weight during the race. Sports drinks help get the fluids into your bloodstream quickly.

When you perspire, your body is not only losing water, it is losing electrolytes (sodium, potassium, chloride and bicarbonate). For your body to perform properly, electrolytes must be replaced. Sports drinks help, but electrolyte replacement capsules are more effective. The recommended dose is one capsule for every 30 minutes of running.

Gels and electrolyte capsules can be purchased online or from any running store.

Fueling your body for long distance running is essential for both performance and safety.

Recent race results:

New York City Marathon (26.2 miles), Nov. 1

Leslee Cade, 38 6:50:07

DRC Half Marathon (13.1 miles), Dallas, Nov. 1

Ashley Brack, 28 2:20:31

Ben Nyabadza, 40 2:40:58

Helen Klein Classic 50K (31 miles), Sacramento, CA, Oct. 31

Ken Johnson, 68 8:17:25

Monster Mash 5K, Houston, Oct. 31

William Woodward, 49 32:45

Houston Half Marathon, Oct. 25

Jessie Parker, 26 1:35:00

Magan Langley, 25 2:05:50

Sunday Night 5K, The Woodlands, Oct. 25

Ken Johnson, 68 31:36

Upcoming Huntsville Races:

Nov. 14 – Kats for the Cause 5K

Nov. 28 – Leftover Turkey 10K, 5K, 1-Mile

Dec. 5 – Texas Trail Runs, 50K & 12.5-Mile, Huntsville State Park

For more information about these and other races, visit the Seven Hills Running Club web site at <http://www.7hills.us> and click on Race Schedule.