

RUNNER'S WORLD

After School Meet? Here's What to Eat

How to schedule your meals and snacks for races that start after the final bell.

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“All runners report for the 3200-meter run,” a race official announces through a megaphone. You finish tying your spikes and are about to make your way to check-in when your stomach growls. You think back on your day: You were up at 7 a.m., had a breakfast of a granola bar and a banana, at school from 7:30 to 2:30 with a small lunch at 11:00 a.m., relaxed at the meet until 3:30. Warmed up and then raced the 4 x 800m at 4:30, the mile at 5:25, and now it's 6:30 p.m., and you forgot to eat all day. Uh-oh.



Eating on race day is easy to forget. But hitting the starting line hungry is a recipe for disaster. All runners need fuel in order to race at their best.

Kelly Jones, a registered dietitian in private practice in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, says that a runner's diet the day or two before the race is the first thing to consider. She urges athletes to be consistent with their diet—getting enough carbohydrates and making sure they're eating so they don't feel hungry. That way, she says, “if for some reason you don't have time to eat on race day, or if you have butterflies, then hopefully you have fueled enough the day before.”

That means having a balanced diet every day of the week. While on race day it's important to keep it up, it's understandable if your schedule or nerves make that more difficult.

With the help of Jones, *Running Times* HS devised an eating schedule for when you have a meet after school. Use the schedule as a guide for your diet on race day, but make sure to individualize it to fit your tastes. And remember, your body needs fuel, so make sure you're getting enough calories on race day.

After School Meet: Fueling Planner

6:45 a.m: Breakfast

“If it's an after school race, then breakfast is extremely important,” Jones says. She advises a balanced breakfast that includes carbohydrates and protein. Eggs or oatmeal with some sort of nut butter (peanut or almond work) are great options. You don't want to feel hungry on race day. Having a balanced breakfast to start the day off will help with that.

11:00 a.m: Lunch

Same as breakfast; make it balanced. Eat a turkey sandwich or a peanut butter and jelly. If your stomach can handle dairy well, yogurt can be a great component to lunch. You don't want to feel stuffed, but if you do accidentally

eat too much, you still have a few hours before race time, so don't panic. You'll have plenty of time to digest.

1:00 to 3:00 p.m.: Snacks

If you eat lunch at 11:00 a.m. and your first race isn't until 4:30 p.m., you'll likely need a snack sometime before race time. Her suggestions: a handful of almonds, a banana, a granola bar, an energy bar, trail mix with dried fruit, or graham crackers with nut butter. "Things that absorb quickly but still don't make you feel full right away," she says.

3:30 to 6:30 p.m.: Racing and Eating

It's a delicate balance, but if you're running three races, you are going to need to refuel between hard efforts. Figure out exactly how long before a race you like to eat. For some it's three hours, for others it's just two. But if you run the 4 x 800m at 4:30 and have an hour before the mile, you are going to need a few calories so that you're energized for that race. The easy solution is having a few sips of Gatorade, a bite of an energy bar and water to quench your thirst.

Eating or drinking protein can be very helpful, but be careful about upsetting your stomach. (Protein intake in between races helps with leg soreness the day after the race.) Jones says that the longer you have between races, the more protein you'll be able to ingest. She says some chocolate milk (a half cup or so) is a great post race drink, but she knows that it could cause issues with digestion. Having dried fruit like raisins, apples or mangos and sports drink can be a good snack between races as well. (Try it out at practice first to make sure that your stomach doesn't react poorly.)

When you're finally done racing for the day, make sure to refuel within 15 to 30 minutes of your final cool down. For exact numbers, as Leslie Bonci, the director of sports nutrition at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, said in an earlier "The Furnace" post, "replace 24 ounces of fluid for every pound lost during a run, eat 12–15 grams of protein and 35–50 grams of carbohydrates immediately after a run." Protein and carbohydrates statistics are listed on the nutrition label of most foods.

7:30 p.m.: Dinner

Pig out! Well, not exactly. Make sure to eat a full, balanced meal with vegetables, carbohydrates and protein. After a long day of racing, your body needs refueling. This could be pasta or a hamburger. And if there is a day to have dessert, this is definitely that day. (Ice cream *does* have protein.)

As with all nutrition suggestions from *Running Times* HS, make sure to figure out what works best for you. Test out anything new before a practice, not a meet, and figure out what your stomach can handle. Check back later for how to fuel for an all-day invitational.