

THE NIGHT FUEL

Signed up for the Sundown? With the growing popularity of nocturnal races, it's important to know what to eat and drink prior to that after-dark race.

Text Jaclyn Reuters

Race day has arrived. All your training sessions and nutrition preparation strategies will be put to the test. Your pre-race meal can either make it or break it. Long-distance running events require high rates of carbohydrate oxidation. Muscle and liver carbohydrate stores ought to be matched to the anticipated needs of the event.

A night race is advantageous in many ways. You do not need to wake up early to eat. You are not deprived of sleep, typical of early morning races. Your usual dinner can be your pre-race meal which makes it more convenient. It is significantly cooler and it should get cooler further into the race as opposed to morning races that will see the temperature rise.

Pre-Race Preps

The last full meal should be three to four hours before the race. This allows optimal digestion and energy supply. Eating carbohydrate-rich foods helps replenish glycogen stores and improve endurance. Fluid intake at this stage is also crucial.

THE EFFECTS OF NIGHT RACE ON OUR NUTRITION

- ▶ You will get hungrier the day after the race.
- ▶ Your sleep pattern will be reversed as though you were in Europe. Most runners would take the day off after the race and sleep in the morning till afternoon. Try not to let that affect the next night's sleep as your body clock will go haywire and so will your meal times.
- ▶ While you do need to replenish carbohydrate and protein stores, refrain from oily and fatty foods as that will slow down the process.

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Two hours before the race, you should be topping up fluid levels and maintaining a good hydration status. Check the colour of your urine, it should be colourless by this stage. If you find yourself peeing every hour, it is perfectly fine.

Conversely, a night race can pose some challenges such as staying awake. In desperate situations, some may turn to caffeine to keep them up. Do remember that coffee has differing effects on individuals. It can make them jittery and in some cases, sleepy! For those who get a caffeine kick from their usual dose, it is fine to drink coffee. For irregular coffee drinkers, it is best not to start because it can cause headaches and gastrointestinal disturbances such as diarrhoea.

Coffee contains caffeine that can trigger a diuretic effect. Excess caffeine intake can make the runner want to urinate during the run which is highly unwelcome. As water is a critical nutrient, do not drink more than three cups of coffee on race day. This can lead to dehydration causing cramping and early fatigue.

The depletion of muscle glycogen stores is associated with a feeling of fatigue and the runner feels the need to reduce pace. Carbohydrate supplements in the form of sports drinks, sports gels and energy bars provide useful carbohydrate for the half and full marathon. Practise eating these on training days. Do not try anything new on race day. You can eat one carbohydrate gel every hour, drink two big mouthfuls of sports drink every 15 minutes and eat a sports bar two to three hours into the race if needed. Again, practise doing all these to see what suits you best.

The Crucial Meal

The most important meal is the last main meal before the race starts. It should consist of carbohydrate, protein and fluid. Fat should be kept at a minimum to facilitate faster digestion and utilisation of energy. The pre-run meal must consist of 500-1000kcal. This includes calories from fluids as well. The calorie breakdown of the last meal should be 70% carbohydrate, 15-20% protein and 10-15% fat.

Carbohydrate-rich foods include bread, pasta, potato, rice, noodles and cereals. Portion size should be between 200-300g of cooked weight. They should be cooked plain without added fat. Examples of added fat are butter, margarine, creamy dressings, mayonnaise, sour cream and large amounts of oil. Protein foods to be included can be chicken, fish, beef, pork, beans, lentils, eggs and tofu. They can be pan-fried with a small amount of oil, steamed, baked or grilled. Portion size should be 150-250g cooked weight. Vegetables can be included here and the portion should be approximately 50-100g cooked weight. If you have the 'runs' before any race, you can skip the vegetables. Drink 500-750ml of any sports drink (e.g. 100plus, Gatorade, H2O etc.) together with this meal to stay hydrated.

If you were somehow unable to eat a full meal four hours before the run, you still have the final opportunity to top up your glycogen levels. One to two hours before the run, liquid meals would be better. This can be a milkshake made up of skim milk, banana and low fat yoghurt. For lactose intolerant runners, use soy milk and soy yoghurt. Or you can have a honey and jam sandwich with 500ml of sports drink.

Thirty minutes before the race starts, drink 100-150ml of sports drink and have a final pee-stop.

Post-Race Treats

When the race is over and you have expended a considerable amount of energy and lost plenty of fluids, it's time to replenish! Eating a solid meal 30 minutes post race may not be possible. The most crucial nutrients at this stage are carbohydrate, sodium and potassium.

The good news is that these can all be found in a sports drink. Drink at least 500ml of any sports drink within 30 minutes after you finish. Soon after, get your hands again on a carbohydrate-rich snack. This can be a banana, jam or honey sandwich, sports bar, sweetened fruit juice, dried fruit, cereal with milk, fruit with yoghurt or canned fruit with sorbet. You can drink water or a sports drink all day the next day as you would be nursing some aches and pains. You still need to stay hydrated.

QUICK FACTS

Food & Drinks To Avoid

- Alcohol provides empty calories that can also cause dehydration prior to the race.
- Cordials are too sweet and have a slow gastric emptying rate.
- Teas and coffees contain caffeine which is dehydrating and may cause diarrhoea.
- Cola and energy drinks contain high amounts of sugar and caffeine that delay gastric emptying and may cause undesirable bowel movements.
- Oily and deep-fried foods take a longer time to digest and cause stomach discomfort.
- If you are having pasta, make sure it is with a tomato-based sauce.
- If it's a baked potato, skip the sour cream and bacon bits. Your meals must be carbohydrate-rich not 'fat-rich'.
- Avoid all full-fat versions of milk, cheese and yoghurt to prevent sluggishness. The low-fat versions are fine.

Do's And Don'ts

Many athletes suffer from gastrointestinal stress and nervousness before a race so the calorie content of a meal should be smaller closer to race time. Liquids are usually preferred one hour before the race begins.

Avoid highly sugared drinks as they cause a rapid increase in blood glucose levels followed by a rapid decline which will be detrimental at any time of the race. Examples of highly sugared drinks are cordials, soft drinks, fizzy drinks and any drink with syrup added to it. If you are a regular coffee drinker, make sure your last cup of coffee is more than two hours before the race.

Avoid drinks that are creamy such as ice cream milkshakes, avocado milkshakes and frappuccinos.

Avoid meals that are high in fat as they take a long time to digest e.g. fried chicken wings, fries, burgers, curries, dishes with coconut milk, battered or crumbed foods like nuggets or tempura. For those who get 'butterflies in the stomach' before the race, it is also advisable to avoid foods containing lactose and fibre. That includes milk, cheese, yoghurt, fruit and vegetables. **R**

RECOMMENDED RECIPES PRIOR TO NIGHT RACE

10 MINS
Preparation
35 MINS
Cooking

MIXED MUSHROOMS RISOTTO

Serves 1

Ingredients

Oil spray
¼ leek, halved lengthways, sliced
125g mixed mushrooms (e.g. button, shiitake), sliced
½ cup Arborio rice
375ml liquid chicken or vegetable stock
25g enoki mushrooms
1 tbsp grated low-fat mozzarella cheese
1 tbsp chopped spring onions
Salt and pepper

Directions

1. Spray a large saucepan with oil and heat.
2. Add leek and all mushrooms except enoki and stir over medium heat for 5 minutes, until softened.
3. Add rice and stir for 2 minutes.
4. Add stock, reduce heat and simmer uncovered for 20-25 minutes or until liquid is almost all absorbed.
5. Add enoki mushrooms and cheese and stir well to combine.
6. Season with salt and pepper to desired taste.
7. Garnish with spring onions and serve.

(Note: For vegetarians, you may double this recipe and treat it as your pre-meal.)

NUTRITION PANEL

Nutrient	Per Serving
Energy (kcal)	331
Protein (g)	11.6
Total Fat (g)	10.9
— Saturated Fat (g)	3.5
Cholesterol (mg)	6
Carbohydrate (g)	31.4
Dietary Fibre (g)	5.3
Sodium (mg)	1034

5 MINS
Preparation
15 MINS
Cooking

HONEY MUSTARD CHICKEN

Serves 1

Ingredients

1 tbsp Dijon mustard
1 tbsp honey
¼ tsp steak sauce
Oil spray
200g skinless, boneless chicken thigh

Directions

1. Heat the frying pan and spray with oil.
2. In a shallow bowl, mix the mustard, honey and steak sauce. Set aside a small amount of the mixed sauce for basting, and dip the chicken into the remaining sauce to coat.
3. Pan-fry the chicken 10-15 minutes, turning occasionally, or until juices run clear. Baste occasionally with the reserved sauce.
4. Serve with Mixed Mushrooms Risotto.

NUTRITION PANEL

Nutrient	Per Serving
Energy (kcal)	343
Protein (g)	37.9
Total Fat (g)	8.6
— Saturated Fat (g)	2.6
Cholesterol (mg)	175
Carbohydrate (g)	17.4
Dietary Fibre (g)	0
Sodium (mg)	343

20 MINS
Preparation
25 MINS
Cooking

JAPANESE BEEF & VEGETABLES ON RICE

Serves 1

Ingredients

½ cup liquid beef stock
1 ½ tbsp soy sauce
¼ tsp mirin
½ tsp sugar
125g rump steak, thinly sliced across grain
1 spring onion, sliced
75g broccoli, cut into florets
50g snow peas
¼ red capsicum, sliced
1 egg, lightly beaten
1 ½ cup cooked Japanese rice
Extra spring onions, to garnish

Directions

1. Place stock, soy, mirin and sugar in a saucepan and bring to the boil, reduce heat and simmer for 5 minutes.
2. Add beef and simmer for 5 minutes. Add vegetables and simmer for 3 minutes.
3. Pour in the egg in a thin steady stream and allow to spread in the pan; do not stir.
4. Cover and cook over medium heat for 5 minutes until the egg is set.
5. Serve rice in a bowl topped with the beef mixture and garnish with spring onions.

NUTRITION PANEL

Nutrient	Per Serving
Energy (kcal)	798
Protein (g)	57.8
Total Fat (g)	14.2
— Saturated Fat (g)	4.6
Cholesterol (mg)	234
Carbohydrate (g)	107.6
Dietary Fibre (g)	5.2
Sodium (mg)	1101