Nutrition for Runners and Athletes

Once you start running, walking, or exercising your body will need extra fuel. You burn around 100 calories for each mile that you run. Not only that, your muscles will be needing extra protein to keep them operating efficiently and to recover properly. Here is a guide of the foods that you should be eating as a new runner:

* **Complex Carbs**- Choose fruits, vegetables, & whole grain options that will not spike your blood sugar and leave you feeling depleted.
  + Good: Sweet potatoes, Whole Grain Breads/Pasta/Pizza, All Vegetables
  + Bad: White bread/pastas/pizza, muffins, donuts,
    - Can promote inflammation
* **Protein- Essential** for both tendon and muscle repair. The more often you run and the further distance you cover, the more repair work there will be for your muscles.
  + Choose high quality and preferably lean, such as chicken, tofu, eggs, nuts, low fat yogurt, or fish, if you are also trying to shed a few pounds. For those runners who do not have a weight problem, low fat protein will not be a concern.
* **Fat**- Monounsaturated fats such as olive oil, flax seed oil, canola oil, and avocados are the healthiest fats to consume. Monounsaturated fats have been linked to a decrease in heart disease and stroke, and are one of the basic ingredients of the Mediterranean Diet. It is healthier for a runner to obtain their fat calories from these sorts of fats and oils than from unhealthy options such as lard or deep-fried anything
  + Besides being an excellent source of high-quality protein (you get about 30 grams in a four-ounce serving), salmon is one of the best food sources of omega-3 fats. These essential fats help balance the body's inflammation response, a bodily function that when disturbed appears to be linked to many diseases including asthma
* **Water**- Water should be consumed evenly throughout the day to keep fluid levels up and your body evenly hydrated. Most runners tend to be dehydrated. Do not wait until you’re thirsty, once thirst sets in you are already dehydrated.
  + Consume at least ½ your body weight in ounces
  + Herbal tea, sports drinks, & fruit juices count toward hydration (be cautious of high sugar drinks)
  + Caffeine and Alcohol do NOT count toward hydration intake- they dehydrate you
* **Balanced Meals**- Meals should be comprised roughly of 20 percent fats, 50-60 percent complex carbohydrates and 20-30 percent proteins. Ensure that you consume plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables.
  + Fruit smoothies are also an excellent and quick source of [nutrition](http://community.active.com/community/coolrunning/carbocanteen?view=discussions). A good variety of colorful foods should almost make a vitamin pill unnecessary.
* **Timing of Meals**-
  + **Before You Run**- 1-2 hours before, if you only have 30 mins choose something small that you know sits well on your stomach
    - **Choose** options that will be absorbed quickly: bananas, oranges, oatmeal, bagel or whole grain toast, energy bar (Bonk Breakers, Kind Bar).
    - **Avoid** foods high in fat and fiber before the run, as these are not digested quickly and have a tendency to sit in our intestines longer: burgers, limit peanut butter & avocado, dairy, too many vegetables.
  + **After Your Run**- Replenish tired muscles looking for fuel **within 30 mins- 1 hour**. Eating a meal rich in protein and complex carbohydrates in within this time frame will assist with muscle and tendon repair.
    - Examples: Eggs, Omelet with vegetables, Greek Yogurt Parfait, Turkey Sandwich on Whole Grain Bread, Grilled Chicken Salad, etc.
* **Snacks**- Running on a regular basis will cause your metabolism starts to run a bit faster, which means that you will be burning up more calories. This is great news for those who want to shed a few pounds. Those who don't need to lose any weight will need to eat a little extra.
  + Nutritional snacks such as fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grain sandwiches, smoothies, nuts, eggs, yogurts, and protein or health-food bars can all help to alleviate the dreaded energy slump
  + . Healthy snacks will also ensure that your muscles and liver are always ready for further exercise, and additionally, you will have sufficient energy to get through day-to-day activities.
  + Smaller meals more often will also keep your blood sugar levels more steady and your metabolism running high. Aim for three smaller meals, and two to three snacks throughout the course of the day

**Closing**:

As a rule, runners need to consume more calories than the non-runner. The consumption of good quality protein is vital for muscle repair, as is a steady supply of complex carbohydrates. Beware of empty calories that will only provide you with a sugar high and slump. Optimized running performances are dependent on consuming quality foods in a larger quantity, as well as careful timing of when you eat.