

Words-From-The-Wise

I asked a number of our experienced marathon runners to give me their personal (and maybe even top secret) routines that they use when preparing for and running in a marathon.

If you are a relatively new marathon runner, or even if you have run a couple already but aren't exactly sure what you can do to improve your marathon experience, there is probably something you can learn from their perspectives on what they do to prepare and succeed in that 26.2-mile race.

So, read on and find out what they have learned—sometimes the hard way!

ERNIE TAKAHASHI

The Night Before A Race

Spaghetti / and a tomato sauce with turkey meat (instead of beef or pork), small salad, and French bread.

In The Morning

Banana, and a slice of toast with peanut-butter and strawberry jam. A cup of coffee. And I carry a water-bottle to drink just before the gun goes off.

MEG SVOBODA

In The Morning

One or one-half Power Bar (chocolate or vanilla) with one cup of black coffee 1.5 hours before the race.

During The Race

One Power Bar gel-packet every 10km, with some water, during the marathon.

JENNY HITCHINGS

I always think a runner should start thinking about race nutrition 2-3 days prior to the race, as I believe what you take in then, matters. I generally stay away from heavy dairy, high fibrous foods (beans, roughage, energy bars, seeds) and anything fried (not that I

eat this, anyway). I like to eat clean, easily digestible foods...bread, pasta, rice, potatoes, lean meats, fish, eggs, bananas.

The Day Before A Race

I do the same thing as I mentioned above. I recommend not eating a bunch of “tasters” at the Expo. I don’t stuff down a ton of carbs, but just eat simply. Sometimes a bigger lunch is good, as nerves can hinder getting food down at dinnertime. My go to dinner is, Sushi! Rice, fish, and avocado...a perfect combo all in one (no sauce, cream cheese (yuck) or fried stuff in my rolls). If I don’t eat sushi, simple pasta dishes, chicken and rice, a turkey burger, some pizza (without cheese) do the trick, too! And yes, I always have a beer or a glass of wine.

Race Day

I usually feel too amped and nervous to eat-- but I do. 1.5-ish hours before a race, I will always have 2 pieces of toast, a bagel (with butter and jelly) or Eggo waffles! Sometimes, I add peanut butter to toast--but not often. Recently, I have been trying out eating oatmeal (with a little banana, butter and brown sugar) before my long runs and it’s been sitting quite nicely with me! Not sure why I waited so long in my running career to try this. Plus, coffee--always a little coffee. Maybe 30 min. prior, I’ll eat some banana. Lately, I have been taking in UCAN 30 min. prior to the race - this is a high starch/carb drink that allows me to feel energized and satiated for at least 90 min. into my race. Of course, runners should try this on training runs first!! See attached link to an article I wrote for the Masters Athlete website:

<http://themastersathlete.com/blog/you-want-a-good-gut-feeling-about-sports-nutrition/>

Racing

Now, here’s where I tell you, do as I say, not as I do. I’m not very good at fueling during marathons--though I do my best. I do think most runners may need more fuel than I take in; but it also depends on how long they’re out on the course! The UCAN has helped me not to have to ingest too many energy gels (probably 2). I always carry 3-4 gels (I like Clif Citrus). If I don’t take UCAN, and if I’m being a diligent racer, I will take a gel near a water stop every 7-8 miles...so yes, I usually only get 3 gels in me--sometimes 4 if I’m feeling bonky or need the electrolytes. I also try and drink (even if only a sip) at every aid-station. I do not carry a bottle. Hydration is probably the most important aspect! Stay hydrated. Without water or energy drinks (ones you’ve trained with) cramping, seizing up, diarrhea, headaches and light headedness can be issues, for sure.

Post Race

I let the tummy settle, get some protein (or something) in, and then bask in the glory that I can eat whatever I want!! Funny thing is, I’ll probably be more hungry the next day.

DENNIS EARLY

The Day Before A Race

Key is to stay off your feet, and stay hydrated. Eat well the night before the race ... something that will fill you up but not leave you feeling bloated or uncomfortable overnight. Chicken and pasta work for me.

Race Morning

Coffee!!! Essential for waking up my brain, as well as that pesky lower GI tract ... go to the bathroom before the race starts, avoid the need for a mid-race pit stop. Food!!! Peanut butter toast and a banana are my favorite. If there is going to be a long gap between breakfast and race time, then something a bit more substantial like an egg sandwich. Take a bagel, banana or peanut butter sandwich along with water/Gatorade on the bus ... last thing you want to do is find yourself at the starting line wondering, "I'm hungry ... what's for lunch?"

During the Race

1 Gel every 50-55 minutes works for me. Strawberry Clif Shots/with Caffeine are my favorite. Use your long runs to experiment with different flavors and length of time between energy boosts to figure out what works for you. During the race I drink when I'm thirsty ... CIM spaces the aid stations pretty well, so I try to grab either water or Gatorade at every station. A tactical decision is whether to walk or run through the aid stations. I prefer to run, as re-starting becomes difficult late in the race. If you prefer to walk, grab your drink and get out of the traffic flow. Practice grabbing a cup of fluid and drinking on the run in shorter races leading up to the marathon. 3 gels is the most I can cram into the pocket of my shorts, so if necessary I'll grab another one on the course. Above all, have fun!

MAI TRAN

Pre-Race

The two nights before I usually eat some form of rice--like sushi or Korean bbq with rice. I love my rice; so it's a good carb load for me.

During The Race

I usually try to limit my gu/gel by eating some form of fruit--like bananas or oranges. This is given out at CIM around mile 12 and it helps a lot. But I do try to have some form of calories every five miles... Fruit or power gel.

DENNIS ZILAFF

Nutrition and Hydration for a Marathon

This is a complicated topic and it requires the runner to review the extensive amount of research on this area and to use that research with trial and error (hopefully in training runs) for each individual since we are all different. That being said, let me try to give general tips on what to do and more importantly what not to do in a marathon. Also, for purposes of these suggestions, I am assuming that the runner is non-elite, and is fairly new to longer distances such as the marathon.

Self-Contained System

I always suggest that each runner come to a marathon self-contained, in other words, be prepared for having little support during the marathon. If you are running CIM, you will have fluid and some nutrition almost every two miles but in other marathons you may have to rely on what you brought yourself. Therefore, I always suggest that you wear a small “fanny pack” with essentials in it. I wear what is called a 10K pack which fits close to the body.

In that fanny pack I always carry paper towels that I use as toilet paper in an emergency (placed in a plastic sandwich bag) to keep it dry. Paper towels hold up much better than TP. In that same plastic bag I carry Excedrin since it is the drug of choice for me. Research suggests that you should not take Motrin (ibuprofen) during long runs since it is very damaging to your kidneys (See Western States website for research). Excedrin has Tylenol (acetaminophen), aspirin and caffeine, all good stuff when you start to hurt. I also carry some type of pill for diarrhea (real emergencies), Tums, and money. Finally, I always carry some emergency energy source and for me it is Jelly Bellies and/or shot blocks. The two main issues you will likely encounter are stomach issues and bonking. Sugar on your tongue sends a message to your brain that you are OK and that energy is coming (See research on WS Webpage). The money is also for real emergencies. If you are really bonking you can hit a store or bar (I did this in the Portland marathon at mile 22) and you can purchase a coke which I will explain is one of my miracle picker-uppers.

Along with the fanny pack, I always carry a throw away water bottle that I take to the start since you get nervous and sometimes have a dry mouth. Again, not for elites, but I also carry a small water bottle, sometimes this throw away, with me during the marathon if I have never run it before. Just in case the race does not have the aid stations or support it claims. This is especially true if the marathon is new or has questionable management. You will not encounter this with CIM since the Sacramento Running Association management is the best in the business. Also, know your race, if you are running a big marathon such as Boston or New York you may have to wait hours before you run so you need to bring food and water to use while you wait for the start.

Hydration

This is very important for reasons you may not understand. You need to be very scientific about hydration. It may be too late for CIM but you need to find out how much water your body needs during a run and this is very much individualized and weather dependent. I know in warm weather (90 degrees or hotter) I use 16 ounces of water every 5 miles. In cooler weather (50 degrees -similar to CIM) I only need about 8-10 ounces of water or half for the same distance. I know this because I have tested myself. This is easy to do. Get naked and weigh yourself, then run 10 miles at race pace and race conditions and either do not drink any water or drink a measured amount of water such as 16 ounces (which is one pound). At the end of the run, get naked again and wipe off all sweat and weigh yourself again. Water weighs one pound for every pint (16 ounces). Therefore, if you ran 10 miles without water and you lost a pound, you know you need about a pint of water every 10 miles. That is my scenario for CIM.

Now it is very important to note that you are more likely to get hyponatremia (too much water) during a run, than to get dehydrated, and hyponatremia is far worse to have than dehydration (again, see multiple studies done on this issue on the Western States website). So, it is much better to run less hydrated than to be over hydrated. Studies have shown that being down 2-3% of your body weight is where you do your best running. So, my advice, especially to the slower runners is to be careful about taking in too much water. The old saying of drink, drink, drink is not accurate, you need to know your body and drink to thirst.

Now a word about supplements and replacement drinks. During a marathon, almost no one will need to take in electrolytes since your body has plenty unless you go into the marathon depleted (don't do this). If you insist on taking in electrolytes, separate them from your nutritional needs. CIM uses NUUN, an electrolyte replacement drink, that does not contain sugar. This is a good thing since you cannot control how it is mixed and you need to get your energy separate from your hydration. Too much sugar and acid flavoring in electrolyte replacement can cause stomach problems and this is why companies like NUUN do not combine the two. Now for those who use their own replacement and have used it in training, continue to do so in a marathon since you know it works for you. You should also know that God gave you salt and sweet receptors on your tongue for a reason. These receptors tell your brain that either salt (electrolytes) or sugar are coming so that your brain does not panic and will allow the body to keep running. Therefore, if you take in electrolytes, do it so that your brain knows it, let the salt go over your tongue like it does in a drink or if you just put salt on your tongue. Do not take it in expensive electrolyte pills or capsules (think S caps) since they go to your stomach to open. Again, this is all researched and you can find it on the Western States webpage.

Emergencies During A Run

As stated before, if you are bonking, do what it takes to get yourself back together. For me, if I drink a coke at mile 17-20 in a marathon, I am good to go to the end. Thus, the reason for the money. If you are late in the marathon and you are bonking, go into one of the many small stores or bars along the way, and buy a coke--it is better than walking to the finish. CIM has multiple places along Fair Oaks and J Street to pop in for a coke. I

say this is for emergencies but I always plan on getting a coke before I crash. By the way, a coke has lots of sugar and caffeine which is why it makes you feel good during a run.

Nutrition

The better shape you are in, the less nutrition you need during a marathon since your body is more efficient. You do not see elite runners eating lots of energy bars during the race. Nutrition is different than hydration but similar principles apply. Most people will use 3,000 to 4,000 calories during a marathon. Assuming you go into the marathon fully glycogenated, meaning your muscles and liver are stocked and ready for the marathon, than you should be able to easily run 18-20 miles just on your glycogen. That leaves you a bit short, but not to worry, because your body has other sources of energy such as fat. The problem with fat is that it is slow to burn and usually does not start for the first couple of miles. So, without getting into all the biochemistry, suffice it to say you can run many marathons on no food but it feels better to have sugar going to your brain. Therefore, I start doing some form of sugar starting about mile five and eat every half hour or hour thereafter. The sugar you use should be the same that you used in training since you know that works. I also like to get a little protein and fat with my carbohydrates (sugar) since it just makes my stomach feel better. But sugar is sugar and some gets to your brain a little faster (so says GU) but you do not have to pay a lot of money to get this source. Any type of candy, will usually work as long as it agrees with you. CIM will have GU and other sugar treats along the way. You will also have people giving out fruit such as bananas and oranges but I would only take those if you know you can tolerate them. Again, this is why you need to experiment in training to know what works for you.

What should you eat days before the race and the morning of the race? I always tell people to eat what they ate before a long training run where that training run felt great. Do not over carbohydrate-load since you may find yourself in bathrooms instead of on the course. I always eat a bland diet, for me it is baked chicken, with mashed potatoes and peas, the night before a race. It is comfort food that has always worked for me. On the other hand, I had one of my best marathons drinking a few beers and eating Mexican food the night before - go figure. So, the take from this is to not over indulge and eat things you are used to eating, if possible. The morning of the race I stay away from fibrous (roughage) foods since they may cause intestinal issues. I have always eaten English muffins, with peanut butter and honey, and that has successfully gotten me through many marathons and ultramarathons. I have also been known to eat English muffins and cheddar cheese since, like peanut butter it has protein and stabilizes sugars and it has never caused me intestinal issues. But I think you should eat what you have eaten before successful long training runs since you know it works for you.

Just remember that hydration and nutrition are individualized to the person and why it is so important to perfect this aspect of your race in training. Good luck.

KEN BOGDAN

Before The Marathon

Here is my prep for the marathon:

Three Days Before- I try to drink a little more water than usual to be well hydrated.

Two Days Before-I try to eat a BIG dinner late and get a really good night of sleep.

One Day Before- Bagels, bagels, bagels in the morning. Snack throughout the day on Clif bars. Saturday afternoon a big Togos sub-sandwich, eating half for lunch, then the other half a couple hours later. Dinner on the early side--pasta with tomato sauce.

Race Morning - Coffee, eating maybe a couple of cookies (if enough time before the start of the race), 2-3 pieces of white bread to eat on the bus to the race. Sip a bottle of water. Eat a GU at the starting line.

During The Race

Eat GU every 5 miles.

JACKIE SWORD-OLSON

Training Tip - Keep marathon notes so you can go back and review.

Week Before The Race

Eat plenty of greens, vegetables, high protein, and high fiber **early** in the week prior to race, since you stay away from these just a day prior to the race. Stay well hydrated 3 days before eat more carbs such as: rice, oatmeal, and pasta. Make sure to eat some protein too; or else you will be hungry and overeat. Drink a little more water but don't drink too much or it will mess with your nutritional balance.

Day Before the Marathon Pasta - mild version - not spicy- mild garlic. Drink an electrolyte, but don't go way overboard, because it can mess up your balance.

Race day (Should be more than an hour before the race.) Toasted Eggo waffle(s) with peanut butter and syrup or honey. For marathon, make a sandwich with two waffles. Is transportable that way and can be made ahead. Or bring a toaster to your hotel room like we did for Santa Rosa. When the smoke detectors go off, you will all be awake then! Fun Times! Small coffee, and sometimes orange juice.

Bathroom Tip! -- Warm drinks, such as coffee or hot tea, can trigger a bathroom break before the start.

30 mins Before The Marathon - UCAN drink.

During The Marathon

I refuel four times during a marathon, using UCAN for the first half and GU for second half. Seems like my stomach likes the mid-way switch from UCAN to GU, plus GU can give extra energy for short times during the end of the race when you really need a boost. I also suspect taking GU and gulping it with water as quickly as possible causes me to have a side stitch. So I grab a cup of water at the aid station, fold it to keep the water from splashing out, and take sips of water with small bits of GU or UCAN, taking slowly until it's gone.

Fueling times

Mile 8 - take slowly, 4 oz. of UCAN pudding in squishy, refillable bag. Only drink water--no Gatorade.

Mile 12-14 - Either 4oz. UCAN pudding with water.

Mile 18-20 - GU - slowly with sips of water or Gatorade.

Miles 20+ - take another GU if you can tolerate and/or take a couple orange slices from the aid-stations. Uncomfortable zone! Try not to stop for as long as you possibly can.

Once you stop the first time, you are telling yourself its okay to stop when you want--and you will! So, don't do it unless there is no other choice.

TEDDY MORRIS JR.

Three Days Before The Marathon

I have never been very good at drinking enough water, because I don't really like the taste of just plain water, so I force myself to increase my water intake so that I am well-hydrated for the marathon.

The Night Before The Marathon

My plan is always not to eat too late; so, I try to make sure that I eat dinner by 8:00 p.m. Also, I have learned that some things are better to eat, the night before the race, than others—at least for me. Foods that are really rich don't seem to work out to well. One time, I ate a pasta dish that was covered with a creamy Alfredo sauce, the night before, and ended up being really hungry the following morning and throughout the race. Also, I had the same problem when I ate a big plate of American-Chinese food the evening before and was extremely hungry when I got to the starting-line. Lately, my new “go-to” food the night before a marathon is a Chiptole burrito—but not a spicy version.

Morning Of The Race

For some reason, I get really hungry during the marathon and could literally stop and eat if I could. So, my latest plan has been to try to eat as much as I can before the race. This probably won't work for everybody, but it has been working for me, and I try to get everything in me by an hour before the race. Currently, my pre-race meal is a small cup of oatmeal, two slices of toast with peanut butter, a banana, and just a small dose of orange juice to wash it all down.

Refueling During The Race

Mostly, I stick to the well-worn formula of eating a gel pack every five to six miles. Sometimes, though, I just can't stand the idea of eating that much gel, due to the sweetness, and so I will bring along a couple of other treats to eat if I feel like it. The marathon is the only time you will ever see me wearing my waist-pouch because I learned the hard way that carrying too much nutritional products in your pockets can be a problem. During the California International Marathon that was held during a torrential rain storm, I had all of my nutritional supplements in the pockets of my running shorts, which were weighed down not only by the food but due to being totally soaked from the rain, and I found myself holding on to the waistband of my running shorts, to keep them up, for the first-half of the race. So, not only think about what you are going to need nutrition-wise for the marathon, but also how you are going to carry it, unless you want to take the chance on the availability of the gels provided at the aid-stations. Also, because I find that I have a hard time eating and drinking while on the run, I will usually stop to eat and drink at the aid-stations. This can be a rather tough call towards the end of the race as it becomes harder and harder to get going after coming to a complete stop to eat and drink. These are some of the things to test out during training runs in preparation for the marathon.

If you have any marathon tips not mentined above, that you would like to share, please do! Send an email to Teddy or reply, using the “Leave a Comment” in the website post.