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*Working Together to Build Healthy, Successful Lives*

# The Right Fuel

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Diet is a vital element to reach optimal performance. What we eat directly affects how we perform. In this article, I focus on what a long distance runner should eat to achieve maximum vitality and endurance.

I am sure you are familiar with the idea of loading up on carbohydrates before a race. This idea still stands true. However, it is very important for us to know the distinction between the different kinds of carbohydrates. Runners need to be particular about what type of carbohydrate they consume, because our body absorbs them very differently. Being able to distinguish between the correct carbs to eat is crucial knowledge, considering they are the most necessary macronutrient to provide energy. So the question is: how can we differentiate between the good and the bad?

There are two different types of carbohydrates: simple and complex. Simple carbohydrates are mostly found in white breads, white pastas, and processed foods. They are absorbed by our bloodstream and burned very quickly in the body. Thus, producing a huge energy rush, quickly followed by an equally large energy crash.

The reason for the spike in energy is because of the high Glycemic Index, or GI, of most simple carbs. The GI is used to measure how fast and how much a food increases our blood sugar levels. Carbohydrates are measured based on their GI index from 1-100 (1 being the lowest and 100 being the highest). Not all simple carbs are bad though. Some simple carbs that have a high GI yet still have some nutrient content, such as certain fruits. However, these high GI fruits should be eaten in moderation and are not recommended before long workouts.

These simple carbs found in white and processed foods, are considered the "bad" carbohydrates. They should be avoided in general, not only by athletes, but also for all seeking to feel healthier and more energetic on a daily basis. Not only do they increase our blood sugar levels, they cause a lot of stress on different areas of the body and are known to cause inflammation.

When your body breaks down carbohydrates, it turns them into a sugar called glucose. Most people hear the word sugar and assume it has a negative connotation. However, our bodies and brains need this specific kind of glucose produced by complex carbohydrates in order to fuel our body and brain. This fuel produced by the liver from carbohydrates is called glycogen. It is the most direct and efficient energy our brains and muscles can receive. Our goal should be to eat foods with low to medium (under 55) numbers on the glycemic index.

This is where the significance of complex carbohydrates comes in to play for athletes and those who are burning a lot of energy through running. The extra carbohydrates a runner needs should be sourced and provided by complex carbs. These carbohydrates are absorbed much slower in the blood stream because of the low GI level, and in turn provide the body with a steady flow of energy. They consist of foods such as whole grains, sweet potatoes, whole-wheat pastas, quinoa, and vegetables. Complex carbohydrates stabilize your blood sugar level and your mood, as well as provide you with long lasting energy. These carbs enable us to avoid "crashes" and give us the endurance we need for long marathons and races. To get more information on the glycemic index, visit [www.glycemicindex.com](http://www.glycemicindex.com) where you can also find low glycemic recipes and facts.

