



## Middle Distance Running

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### About Middle Distance Running

Middle distance running includes events ranging in distance from 800m to 5000m, taking 90 odd seconds to 15-30 minutes to complete, depending on training level. The training for middle distance running is usually much longer than the events and includes a variety of intensities including long easy runs, interval sessions, fartlek running and repetitions. Training may be 1 to 2 times daily, six to seven days per week depending on the level of competition.

### Training Diet

Middle distance runners have high energy requirements to maintain the training volume required. These runners need to ensure they eat enough food and take advantage of opportunities to eat. This may require special attention to ensure good access to appropriate foods and fluids at all times. The training diet should contain plenty of carbohydrate-rich and low fat foods.

### Fluid Needs

Middle distance runners have large fluid requirements secondary to training duration, training climate and fluid losses. During the day water is the fluid of choice, however fluids containing carbohydrate (e.g. milk based drinks, juice) may help to ensure requirements are met in the athlete with high carbohydrate and energy demands.

Similarly, sports drinks containing 4 to 8% carbohydrate are the preferred fluid choice during and after training to encourage both fluid and carbohydrate intake. The salt added to sports drinks helps to optimise hydration.

### What should I eat pre-event?

Pre-event eating should be similar to eating before training, ideally eating two hours before competing so that food can be emptied from the stomach. Pre-event eating should include carbohydrate rich foods such as breakfast cereal, bread, rice, pasta and dry biscuits. Use fluids or liquid meals to top up stores if stomach comfort prevents you from eating large amounts of food. Ideally, pre event eating should be practised in training before competition.

#### Examples of pre event meals:

- Breakfast cereal with low fat milk
- Canned spaghetti on toast
- Pasta with tomato-based sauce
- Toasted ham and tomato sandwich
- Liquid nutrition supplement, such as Sustagen® Sport

### What should I eat/drink during competition?

During most races fluid intake is neither necessary nor practical due to the short duration and high intensity of these events. However, it is important to start well hydrated and replace fluid losses after warm ups, competing and cooling down, especially if competing in multiple events or heats and finals on the same day.  
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Weighing yourself before and after events can help to determine how much fluid was lost, and therefore how much to replace. A loss of 1kg of body weight is assumed to be 1L of fluid lost. Aim to replace 150% of these losses to account for further fluid losses in urine and sweat post-event.

## What about recovery?

A single race is unlikely to exhaust fuel stores, although recovering to compete in multiple events over a day or for training the following day is important. If competing in multiple events over a day be sure to plan ahead by taking practical carbohydrate-rich snacks such as fruit, cereal bars or sandwiches with you to eat between events. Use foods that you are familiar with from your training routine already. Don't rely on the venue to have appropriate food choices, always take your own! If recovering to compete or train the next day the key is to resume the training eating pattern as early as practical.

## Other Nutrition tips

The volume of food and the practical aspects of meeting energy and carbohydrate **requirements will vary** with the level of training and from athlete to athlete. A sports dietitian can help you assess your individual needs to meet your performance goals. To find a sports dietitian near you, go to <http://www.sportsdietitians.com.au/www/html/custom/1800-find-a-sports-dietitian.asp>

There is **limited scientific support** for ergogenic aids (supplements) in competition events of this duration. Carbohydrate-rich liquid meal replacers may help a busy athlete to meet their carbohydrate requirements and may be useful as a pre event meal in some situations.

**Alcohol:** If athletes are going to drink, then do so in moderation. Excess consumption can impair recovery and rehydration and can indirectly (or directly) impact on individual performance. Make sure that recovery and rehydration goals are met before consuming alcohol.

**Be organised!** Young athletes living together with a common lack in domestic and cooking skills can be a problem! So planning meals ahead, a roster-system if rooming in with mates and some ready-to-go meals and snacks for the late nights can help to meet nutrition goals. If cooking means fried eggs on toast every night, a sports dietitian can help out with shopping and cooking classes.

**Iron levels:** Some athletes may have problems with low iron levels, especially females with low iron intakes. Iron levels should be checked regularly during heavy training or if fatigue levels are unusual. See our fact sheet on [Iron Deficiency in Athletes](#) and speak to a Sports Dietitian on how to increase iron in your diet.

**Body fat levels:** While body fat levels are important in most sports, running heavier will reduce speed and stamina, and increase body heat (thus impairing performance) especially during hot conditions on the track. But magic diet pills, miracle cures and quick fixes are not the way to go – instead, a long term approach to weight and body fat maintenance should be the goal.

## How to Get Involved

Go to the Athletics Australia website to find more information about clubs in your area at [www.athletics.org.au](http://www.athletics.org.au)

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