FACT SHEET

MIDDLE DISTANCE RUNNING

ABOUT MIDDLE DISTANCE RUNNING

Middle distance running includes events ranging in distance from 800m to 5000m, taking around 90 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. Cross training and gym sessions are also common. 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. Training diets should be based on quality carbohydrate (from breads, cereals and pasta), moderate amounts of protein, small amounts of fats (such as those found in oily fish, poly and monounsaturated fats and oils), and plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables to ensure sufficient energy, body function, muscle repair, and an adequate supply of vitamins and minerals.

FLUID NEEDS

Dehydration can impair exercise performance so it particularly important for distance runners to consider their fluid needs when competing in warm conditions and extended training sessions. To ensure good day-to-day hydration level, athletes should aim for pale yellow urine. Fluid needs vary for different athletes based on their individual sweat rates. Athletes can easily estimate their sweat rates in various conditions and training sessions by weighing themselves before and after exercise. For more detail see the Fluid in Sport fact sheet. Drinks containing carbohydrates, such as sports drinks (which usually contain 4 to 8% carbohydrate) can be a good option during and after training, to help maintain fluid, carbohydrate and sodium consumption.

EATING BEFORE COMPETITION

Pre-event eating should be similar to eating before training (to ensure tolerance), ideally eating two hours before competing so that food can be digested. 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 discomfort 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

EATING AND DRINKING DURING COMPETITION

During most races it is not necessary or practical to eat or drink due to the short duration and high intensity of these events. However, it is important to start well hydrated and replace fluid losses after competing, especially if competing in multiple events or heats and finals on the same day.

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 it is important to plan ahead by taking 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 ensuring you include protein for muscle recovery.

OTHER NUTRITION TIPS

Low iron can be a problem with female gymnasts, particularly elite gymnasts who train long hours. If you are often tired / fatigued, ask your doctor for a blood test to check your iron levels. For more details see the Iron depletion in athletes fact sheet.

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.