



TOP 10 FOODS FOR RUNNERS

Include these foods regularly in your diet to run strong and healthy.

1. Chia Seeds

Chia seeds are one of the best sources of the anti-inflammatory omega-3 fatty acids at 4900mg/oz (comparatively, walnuts provide 2500mg/oz). Runners experience localized inflammation from running (as the muscles work to repair and grow stronger) and omega-3's help to manage this inflammatory process and reduce systemic inflammation (whereas processed meats, sugars, and saturated and trans fats increase inflammation). Per serving (1 ounce), chia seeds provide 4g complete protein, meaning they contain all nine essential amino acids, nearly 20% of the daily recommend intake of calcium, and 11g of fibre!



2. Blueberries

Blueberries come out on top when it comes to antioxidant power. With one of the highest scores (2400) on the ORAC scale (oxygen radical absorbance capacity), they contain compounds like anthocyanin that fight inflammation and oxidation. This makes blueberries a perfect post-run food to control post-run inflammation and oxidative stress, and help the muscles to heal quicker. Blueberries are also known to keep coordination and memory sharp as we age, fight against cardiovascular disease, and they contain a flavonoid that inhibits cancer. Organic or wild blueberries are best, frozen or fresh - however any blueberries are better than no blueberries!

3. Coconut Water

Dubbed "nature's sport drink", coconut water from young green coconuts is a natural source of electrolytes and glucose, helping to replenish stores post-run. Better yet it is also contains cytokinins, which are anti-inflammatory and anti-aging phytohormones. With it's inflammatory fighting qualities, it offers more than the typical sports beverage high in processed sugars and artificial colourings. While it shouldn't be relied upon as a complete sports beverage, it makes an ideal recovery shake base with 57mg calcium, 0.7g iron, 60mg magnesium, 600mg potassium (a banana has 400mg), and 50mg sodium. Blend in some blueberries, chia seeds and a pinch of sea salt, and you've got yourself a sports smoothie!



4. Beets

Beet juice is popular for its ability to increase endurance (by approx. 15%) but the latest studies show whole beetroot consumption also strongly improves running performance (Apr 2012). The nitrates found in beets (also found in celery, spinach, fennel, parsley and arugula) convert to nitric oxide once ingested, relaxing blood vessels, improving blood flow, and decreasing the amount of oxygen your muscles require - thereby enhancing efficiency. Beets are also a great source of antioxidants.

5. Ginger

The anti-inflammatory effects of ginger are well documented and have been used for thousands of years. For the runner, ginger acts similarly to ibuprofen in reducing muscle pain following exercise-induced muscle injury, but without the detrimental side-effects of ibuprofen (and other NSAIDs). Containing compounds called gingerols which suppress pro-inflammatory compounds, ginger helps to manage the post-run inflammatory and healing process. Ginger is also known to boost the immune system, calm the gastrointestinal system, reduce nausea, vomiting and seasickness, and protect against cancer.



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6. Avocados

Runners need healthy fats in order to absorb vitamins and build cell membranes. In fact, the runners diet ideally contains between 20-40% healthy fats. Avocado's are one of the best sources of the heart healthy monounsaturated oil, specifically the omega 9 oleic acid (same kind found in olive oil), and are a good source of the antioxidant lutein, a member of the vitamin A family which fights exercise stress damage and inflammation. Plus, half an avocado contains the same amount of potassium found in one banana (an electrolyte lost through sweating) and just over 1mg of iron (it's recommended endurance athletes consume 18 to 23mg of iron per day). Bonus: avocado's are high in fibre - between 11 to 17g in one!



7. Oats

What would breakfast be like without oatmeal? Many runners rely on this complex carbohydrate to start their day and as pre-run fuel... and for good reason. Oats (steel cut, old fashioned or thick cut) are known for the steady flow of energy they provide, as well as their fibre content (4g per 1 cup cooked) and blood sugar stabilizing effects. Furthermore, they have been shown to strengthen the cardiovascular system, a necessary component to running strong. They also provide 15% of the daily recommended intake of zinc and selenium, two strong antioxidant nutrients.

8. Quinoa

Runners require quality protein to help repair damaged muscles from hard or long runs. Quinoa's claim to fame is the fact it is a complete protein, providing 8g per serving (1/4 cup uncooked). While other grains are missing the essential amino acids isoleucine and lysine, quinoa (technically a seed) contains all 9 essential amino acids. And that's not all! Per serving quinoa is a great source of fibre (5g), complex carbohydrates (39g), iron (2.75mg), and is chock full of antioxidant phytonutrients such as the flavonoids quercetin and kaempferol. These and other phytonutrients (including small amounts of omega-3 fatty acids) mean quinoa is a great anti-inflammatory food as well.



9. Chickpeas

Hard as it is to choose just one of the many wonderful legumes out there, chickpeas (also called garbanzo beans) are one of the most versatile legumes, thereby making this list. It's no secret runners need to consume plenty of carbohydrates - and chickpeas fit the bill, supplying 22g carbs per 1/2 cup. Even better, along with these complex carbs come 7g protein, 6g fibre, and 2.5mg iron. And, as if that were not enough, chickpeas are a rich source of antioxidants, such as the flavonoid quercetin, which also functions as an anti-inflammatory nutrient.

10. Kale

Kale has been named a "superfood" for the very fact it is extremely nutrient dense, packing in the most vitamins and minerals per calorie than almost any other food. On the ANDI scale (nutrient density per calorie) it receives the highest score of 1000; and on the ORAC scale (the antioxidant capacity of foods) it comes in at 1770 (blueberries are valued at 2400, known for their strong antioxidant capacity). Runners use up more vitamins and minerals than non-exercisers - kale, with its 300g potassium, 90mg calcium and 1g iron per 1 cup cooked (36 calories), is a reliable way to help replace them. To top it off, kale is high in vitamins A, C and E, key nutrients for a strong immune system.

