

# Training and nutrition tips for sports challenges

Whatever sport challenge you're taking on, it's important to think about your training and nutrition. Giving yourself plenty of time to prepare and get training will help you to achieve your goals. Below is some information that will lend a helping hand and get you thinking about all aspects of your challenge.



## Training

### When to train

This is generally down to personal preference. Some people prefer to train first-thing in the morning, others like to train in the evenings. Ultimately, you should train at whatever time works best for you. Be sure to try out different times to figure out at what time in the day you perform the best.

Physiologically, early afternoon has been found to be the best time to train; your body is fully woken up and loose and the opportunity to be well fuelled and hydrated is also better. Again, it's down to you and what you feel works best.

### Principles of training

It is common to think that when a training improvement is made, for example running further or running a faster time over a particular distance, that the improvement has been made at that specific time. In fact, that is not the case, the improvement has been made some time previously, following an earlier training session.

During the training session, it is the measurable results that are registered in the form of quicker times or further distances. This is because of the way the body responds to training. When exercising, the body is challenged. Following a training session, when the body is at rest, it adapts, gets stronger and improvements can be measured during a subsequent session. Hence the most important component of any training programme is rest, so that the body is able to adapt to training.

Inadequate rest can result in excessive fatigue, loss of motivation and could even lead to injury.

## Structuring your training sessions

Following correct exercise protocols is key to getting the most out of your training, so that you start out on the road to fitness with safe and correctly balanced training sessions. To get the most out of your training, you should adhere to the following sequence each time you train:

### 1. Warm-up

The warm-up, raises the heart rate, gets blood flowing to the working muscles and prepares the body for exercise. It should be for a minimum of five minutes and replicate the movements or activities of the main session.

### 2. Mobility

Some basic actions to put the limbs through the range of movement that the main session requires will ensure that the joints are loosened up lubricated and will function more efficiently.

### 3. Main session

This will form the bulk of the training session. For example: a brisk 10-minute run or a 30-minute cycle.

### 4. Cool-down

The cool-down should be at a lower intensity than the main session and should bring the body temperature and heart rate closer to pre-exercise levels. Waste by-products of exercise will be flushed from the muscles and tissues, accelerating recovery before the next training session. The cool-down should be a minimum of 5-10 minutes.

### 5. Flexibility

Stretching exercises should be carried out after the main session and cool-down as the body is in a greater state of relaxation than at the beginning of the session. 5-10 minutes spent stretching the muscles worked will maintain suppleness and prevent injury.



## **How to stretch**

To get the most out of your post exercise stretching session, simply follow the step-by-step guide below:

- **Relax**  
It is very important to be relaxed. Physical and mental tension will inhibit your range of movement and prevent your muscles from stretching as effectively. Hence, you will not achieve maximum flexibility benefits.
- **Ease into the stretch**  
Gradually move your body or the limb being stretched into the stretch position. Once you feel slight tension in the muscle, (known as the point of bind), which is the limit of the muscle's flexibility, hold the position. Avoid bouncing or any other movements, which could overstretch the muscle and result in injury.
- **Relax your breathing**  
Always keep your breathing easy and relaxed because that will reduce all-round muscular tension, which in turn will allow you to stretch further. Holding your breath will tense up your entire body, making stretching much harder.
- **Hold for 30 seconds**  
To get maximum stretching benefits, you need to hold the stretch for a minimum of 30 seconds. Stretching each muscle for just a few seconds brings no flexibility benefits.
- **Pain means no gain**  
Stretching should invoke a mild feeling of 'tightness' or tension within the stretched muscle. Pain when stretching indicates injury or a muscle that has been overstretched. Therefore, never stretch beyond a 'comfortable tightness'.
- **Rest and repeat**  
A single stretch for each muscle is very beneficial but if time permits, carry out two stretches for each muscle, separated by a short break of 30 seconds. The second stretch will help extend your range of movement further.
- **Frequency**  
Ideally, stretch the major muscles after every run but if that proves too time-consuming, stretching twice a week is a suitable target.



## ***Nutrition and hydration***

Fuelling your training correctly and keeping well hydrated is extremely important and good nutrition will enhance your running experience. Nutrition and hydration are enormous subjects and if you would like to look more into this, there is tonnes of information online. Alternatively, you could speak with a professional.

**To kick-start your healthy nutrition plan, try and follow the five golden rules below:**

### ***1. Always eat breakfast***

Your body needs good quality fuel for training and by waking up your metabolism after sleep; you actually burn more calories through the day.

### ***2. Leave a gap***

Allow 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 hours between your last meal and your training session to allow for digestion. Exercising on a full stomach will not only feel uncomfortable but will also inhibit your performance.

### ***3. Hydrate***

Drinking water regularly throughout the day is important, but because you are exercising, your fluid requirements will be greater due to sweat losses. However, you will need to focus more on hydration and drinking straight after your workout.

### ***4. Refuel***

Your energy requirements will increase as your training increases and the optimum time to begin your refuelling is immediately after your workout. Always try and eat something (a banana is great) as soon as possible after your cool-down.

### ***5. Don't neglect protein***

Include good quality protein in your diet to support rebuilding because your body will need more to match the increased demands that you are placing on your body.



## ***Race week prep***

The focus for your final week before your event should be relaxing and easier sessions as you gather your energy for your race. Competing in a race requires some planning and organisation so that you can produce your best performance, rather than get caught up in traffic jams or missing key items of kit. Use your extra free time in the final week to plan and prepare for your big day. To make sure that your race goes without a hitch, follow our top race tips below:

- ✓ Assemble and check all your kit early on in the final week.
- ✓ Don't experiment with new kit items on race day, stick with tried, trusted, and broken in items so that you avoid any discomfort.
- ✓ Eat your usual meals on race day, just as if it was a normal training run. Now is not the time to experiment with new energy drinks!
- ✓ Take a box of 'emergency items' such as spare laces and a couple of old t-shirts in case the weather is poor whilst you are warming up.
- ✓ Check over the race organiser's instructions and route descriptions so that you are familiar with all arrangements.
- ✓ Arrive at the race venue early. This will give you time to check in, find the start and finish areas and get settled to calm your nerves.

If you have any questions or need any further advice, don't hesitate to get in touch with [info@supportgstt.org.uk](mailto:info@supportgstt.org.uk) or [info@supportevelina.org.uk](mailto:info@supportevelina.org.uk)

***Best of luck on your challenge, we know you'll smash it!***