

Adolescent Runner Nutrition

Nutrition fundamentals for teenage runners balancing school, training, and growth.

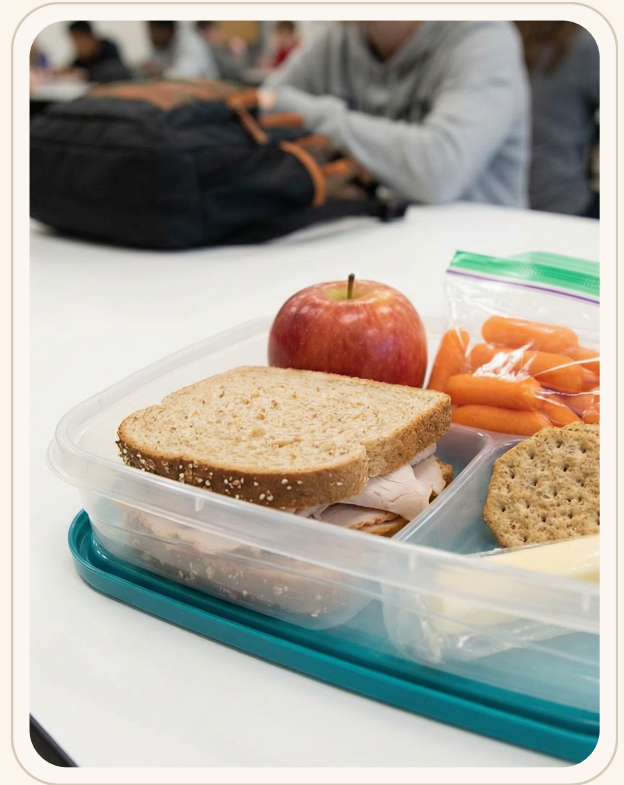
ACCESS
Free resource

AUDIENCE
athlete / coach / parent

READ TIME
5 min

AUDIENCE
Athlete + Coach + Parent

WHY THIS MATTERS



Adolescent Runner Nutrition

QUICK START

Start here

Nutrition fundamentals for teenage runners balancing school, training, and growth.

DAILY STRUCTURE

Three meals is the floor, not the whole plan

- Most young runners also need a pre-practice snack and a recovery option.
- School lunch counts, so weak lunches often create weak practices.

BEFORE PRACTICE

Use simple carbs if the school day ran long

- Bananas, bars, crackers, yogurt, or toast fit well before training.
- Young athletes often say they are fine until the second half of practice proves otherwise.

HYDRATION

Water bottle habits should be taught, not assumed

- Many adolescent runners arrive at practice already behind on fluids.
 - Refill the bottle during school and continue drinking after practice.
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1. Eat early

Breakfast does not need to be perfect.

Breakfast does not need to be perfect. It does need to exist.

An adolescent runner who starts the day empty usually spends the whole day trying to catch up.

- toast and peanut butter
- cereal and milk
- yogurt and fruit

3. Put fuel around practice

Before practice:

simple carbs work well

banana, crackers, applesauce, pretzels, granola bar, or toast are fine

get carbs plus protein in within the first hour

chocolate milk, yogurt plus fruit, sandwich, cereal and milk, or leftovers all work

A practice-day template

Here is a simple structure that works for a lot of teenagers:

BREAKFAST

carb plus protein plus fluid

MID-MORNING

snack if lunch is late

LUNCH

real meal, not just chips and a drink

PRE-PRACTICE

easy carbs

POST-PRACTICE

carbs plus protein

Go deeper next

Escalate sooner when the pattern looks bigger than food timing: [When to Seek Professional Help](#)

SCREEN THE LARGER UNDER-FUELING RISK

[RED-S Warning Signs and Prevention](#)

[If female-athlete fatigue is part of the picture: Iron Deficiency in Female Runners](#)

Colorado and altitude change the picture

If you train in Colorado or anywhere around 6,000 feet and up:

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At altitude, the margin for under-fueling gets smaller. A pattern that might be merely sloppy at sea level can turn into poor recovery, heavy legs, headaches, or iron problems faster.

- fluid needs are higher
- carbohydrate needs can feel higher because training stress is higher
- iron status deserves more respect, especially in female athletes or runners with a fatigue history

Carbohydrate

Carbs are not optional for runners.

Carbs are not optional for runners. They are the main fuel source for training, recovery, and school-day energy.

QUICK REFERENCE

Key targets to keep in view

Use these as planning anchors when you turn the manual into weekly actions.

30-60 MIN

use a snack before practice

GROWTH + SPORT

raises energy needs

Treat this as a decision anchor, not a trivia stat.

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DAILY ROUTINE

matters more than perfection

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COACH TAKEAWAYS

Use this with athletes

These are the cues worth repeating before the week gets busy.

Every day: Breakfast, lunch, dinner.

Snack before and after practice.

Best simple foods: Milk, yogurt, cereal, bagels.

Fruit, crackers, sandwiches.

Check early: Low appetite.

Fatigue, dizziness, or repeated injury.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Use it this week

With adolescent runners, fix the school-day gaps first because that is where most under-fueling starts.

BOTTOM LINE

Growing runners need more structure around food because growth does not pause for sport.

Source topics: adolescent • teenage • growth • school schedule