

21 Great Runners Snacks

Amazing Graze
By Beth Moxey Eck

We're sure you can still hear that voice of admonishment: "No more snacking; you'll ruin your appetite for dinner!"

However, the time has come to silence that guilt-inducing voice in your head once and for all, because snacking is in. Actually it's not even called snacking any more – it's called 'grazing', and nutrition experts now believe that grazing on five smaller meals throughout the day is better than eating three big ones.

Why should this be? It's mainly because a steady food intake keeps your energy levels consistently higher. Also, when you graze, you never become overly hungry, so you don't get the urge to overeat. This makes weight control easier. You also tend to choose higher-quality foods if you never let yourself become too hungry.

But which snacks are best? We took this question to five top sports nutritionists (all dedicated grazers), and they eagerly gave us their recommendations. So check our list, and start snacking – sorry, grazing – and we promise you won't get sent to your room.

1. Bananas

Why they're good: Bananas are full of carbohydrates. They are a good source of vitamin B6, which is vital for managing protein metabolism. (Runners need more protein during and after training.)

When they're good: Before, during, or after exercise. They're great blended into a fruit smoothie. Or simply whip frozen banana chunks with milk in a blender for a delicious recovery shake.

Calories: 105kcal per medium-sized banana

2. Carrots

Why they're good: Carrots are low in calories, but filling. This makes them excellent if you're watching your weight. They contain carotene and vitamin A, which promote eye health and a strong immune system.

When they're good: Eat them at night when you want something to munch but don't want extra calories. Or eat them before dinner if you're famished. This way, you won't overindulge once you sit down for your meal.

Calories: 30-40kcal per medium-sized carrot

3. Cereal bars

Why they're good: A low-calorie cereal bar will satisfy your sweet cravings, without the fat calories of a chocolate bar. And unlike chocolate bars, cereal bars also come with B vitamins and iron.

When they're good: Whenever you feel like satisfying your sweet tooth – without feeling guilty.

Calories: From about 110kcal per 30g bar

4. Cereal with skimmed milk

- Why it's good:** Most cereals are vitamin and mineral fortified, and they're great with fresh fruit sliced on top. Cereal is a quick-to-prepare, easily digestible and healthy way to satisfy your sweet tooth. (Even sweetened cereals such as Frosties and Sugar Puffs are a better low-fat alternative to biscuits.) Choose cereals that have five grams of fibre or more per serving.
- When it's good:** Fine as a pre-run snack, a post-run pick-me-up, or even as a trail mix during a long, easy run.
- Calories:** Between 200kcal and 500kcal (per 45g of cereal with 250ml of skimmed milk)

5. Chocolate milk

- Why it's good:** Chocolate milk is cold and helps keep you hydrated. It also provides plenty of protein, carbohydrates and B vitamins. The calcium in milk will help keep your bones strong.
- When it's good:** An ice-cold shot of chocolate milk is the perfect reward after a hot summer run.
- Calories:** 160kcal per 250ml of semi-skimmed chocolate milk

6. Cottage cheese

- Why it's good:** It's packed with protein, which runners need in larger amounts than sedentary people, for muscle rebuilding and repair. It serves as a good calcium source as well.
- When it's good:** Any time except just before running. Great with fruit after an intense training session or race.
- Calories:** 72kcal per 100g of low-fat cottage cheese

7. Dried apricots

- Why they're good:** These chewy little morsels are low in fat and high in carbohydrate, and provide a decent amount of vitamin A, fibre and potassium.
- When they're good:** Any time. Toss chopped apricots over your cereal at breakfast, or eat whole ones plain before your afternoon training session or as a sweet treat after dinner.
- Calories:** Around 80kcal for 10 dried apricot halves

8. Prunes

- Why they're good:** Prunes (dried plums) contain no fat and are packed with carbohydrates. They're also a good source of fibre and potassium. Eating potassium-rich foods such as prunes helps lower high blood pressure.
- When they're good:** Prunes make a healthy snack almost any time. But don't eat them just before your run, as they can act as a laxative.
- Calories:** Roughly 100kcal for five prunes

9. Energy bars

- Why they're good:** Designed especially for athletes, you can choose from high-carb bars, protein recovery bars, or ones that contain a mixture of carbs, protein and even vitamins. They're tasty and come in all kinds of flavours.
- When they're good:** Post-exercise. Liquid energy is better during or just before exercise.
- Calories:** 200-300kcal per 75g bar

10. Fig rolls

- Why they're good:** Chewy fig rolls are a tasty, convenient source of carbohydrates and fibre. They are carbs that are quickly digestible, making them great on-the-run snacks.
- When they're good:** Any time, even during the middle of a marathon when you need to refuel in a hurry. Of course, if you're prone to 'runner's trots', save them until after the race.
- Calories:** 110kcal per two fig rolls

11. Fruit ice-lollies

- Why they're good:** This refreshing, low-calorie treat is loaded with vitamin C, which fortifies your immune system and helps boost iron absorption. (Make sure you choose lollies made with fruit juice, rather than sugary artificial versions.)
- When they're good:** They're great any time, but they're best immediately after a tough, hot run.
- Calories:** 75kcal per lolly

12. Fruit yoghurt

- Why it's good:** Yoghurt is a great source of calcium, protein and potassium – and it's low in fat and fairly high in carbohydrates. The live and active cultures added to certain types of yoghurt (often called 'bio') will also boost your immune system.
- When it's good:** Any time. Some runners swear by it as a highly digestible pre-race snack, despite its protein content.
- Calories:** 250kcal per 200g of low-fat yoghurt

13. Green soya beans

- Why they're good:** Soya beans in any form are a high-quality source of protein, iron, B vitamins and heart-healthy isoflavones (which also help keep your bones healthy). Soy protein has been shown to lower risk of heart disease and cancer.
- When they're good:** Eat them after a run, or as a low-calorie, but filling, after-noon snack.
- Calories:** 147kcal per 100g raw or boiled

14. Home-made pizza

- Why they're good:** Fresh tomatoes, peppers, sliced onion and mushrooms piled on a ready-made pizza base and lightly sprinkled with low-fat mozzarella or feta cheese – need we say more? A slice of pizza supplies energy from the carb-rich base, protein and bone-strengthening calcium from the cheese and a range of vitamins and phytochemicals from the vegetables.
- When they're good:** Eat a slice after running, or as an afternoon snack to keep you energised for your evening run.
- Calories:** 250kcal per slice (100g)

15. Hummus on pitta bread

- Why it's good:** Split the pitta bread and toast until crisp. Then simply break into pieces and use instead of cracker biscuits. This filling snack packs plenty of protein, fibre, vitamin B6 and folic acid (but be careful: hummus can have up to 27.9g of fat per 100g, even though it's almost all the 'healthy' kind). The latter is especially important for a healthy pregnancy, and has recently been shown to prevent anaemia and breast cancer.
- When it's good:** Hummus works well as a substantial mid-morning or afternoon snack. It's also a healthier evening alternative to peanuts or other fried party snacks.
- Calories:** 280kcal per three tablespoons of hummus and one pitta

16. Individual cheeses

- Why it's good:** Many runners – especially those who don't eat many dairy products – fail to meet their calcium requirement. Individually-wrapped cheeses are available at most supermarkets, and make a tasty, convenient way to take in calcium and protein as well as a little fat. Don't go overboard, though, most full-fat cheeses are at least 25 per cent fat.
- When it's good:** Have a cheese or two with some high-carbohydrate foods after a long run or race. Research shows that eating a little protein along with carbohydrates can speed your recovery.
- Calories:** 80kcal per cheese

17. Porridge

- Why it's good:** Studies show that a bowl of porridge helps lower cholesterol. Porridge will also fill you with plenty of carbohydrates to boost energy and alertness.
- When it's good:** An excellent meal before a race, or whenever you wake up feeling hungry and ready for a hearty breakfast.
- Calories:** 250kcal per bowl made from 45g dry oats and semi-skimmed milk

18. Rice cakes with peanut butter

- Why they're good:** Rice cakes are low in calories, most of which come from energising carbohydrates. Peanut butter is an excellent source of protein and heart-healthy polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fat. It also contains vitamin E, which helps with muscle recovery.
- When they're good:** A perfect filling snack for mid-morning or mid-afternoon.
- Calories:** 125kcal for one rice cake with one dessertspoons of peanut butter

19. Smoothies

- Why they're good:** If you use fruit and skimmed milk, smoothies (made by blending frozen fruit such as bananas, with skimmed milk, orange juice and ice) are an easy way to consume a healthy dose of calcium, potassium and vitamins C and A.
- When they're good:** A cooling summer treat, a smoothie works well for breakfast, before a run, or as a refreshing, re-energising, post-run treat.
- Calories:** Approximately 200kcal per 350ml

20. Smoked ham and cheese bagel

- Why it's good:** Bagels are a conveniently-sized source of complex carbs, while smoked ham is an excellent source of protein and folic acid. A light slathering of low-fat cream cheese will provide additional calcium and potassium. Top it off with a sliced tomato and red onion and you'll add vitamin C, vitamin A and antioxidants as well.
- When it's good:** As a substantial, post-run snack or light meal.
- Calories:** Roughly 300kcal per bagel with two slices of ham and one tablespoon of low-fat cream cheese

21. Tuna fish

- Why it's good:** Tuna comes with protein and heart-healthy omega-3 fats. Research shows that men who eat at least 80-100g of fish per week are less likely to die of a heart attack, and that women who eat at least two servings of fish per week reduce their risk of rheumatoid arthritis.
- When it's good:** Perfect for lunch or an afternoon snack. Consider a tuna salad with low-fat mayonnaise and sliced tomatoes on granary bread. Are you hungry yet?
- Calories:** 110kcal per 100g, canned in spring water