

First Marathon Meal Plan: Sample Days and a Sample Week

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Please read first. This is general, non-clinical information for healthy adults, not a personal diet plan. **If you have a medical or dietary condition (for example diabetes, coeliac disease, an eating disorder or a history of one, kidney or heart conditions, food allergies), are pregnant or breastfeeding, or take regular medication, check with your GP or a registered dietitian before changing how you eat.** Portion sizes are deliberately not given: eat to appetite, and eat enough. Marathon training is not the time to diet.

The idea: a normal plate, adjusted for the day

Start from the NHS Eatwell Guide: fruit and veg, starchy carbs (wholegrain where you can), protein, some dairy or alternatives, and fluids. Then adjust the size of the **starchy carb** part of your plate to the day's training.

Day type	Plate
Rest or easy day	About a third veg/fruit, a third starchy carbs, a third protein + some dairy or alternatives
Workout or medium run day	Slightly bigger carb portion, with a snack around the run
Long-run day / race build-up	Carbs become the biggest part of the plate; slightly less fibre and fat if your stomach prefers it

Fluids: drink regularly through the day. Drink to thirst, and don't force down large amounts.

Sample everyday day (rest or easy run)

Meal	Example	Veggie swap
Breakfast	Porridge with milk, berries and a spoon of nut butter	Plant milk
Snack	Apple and a handful of nuts	—
Lunch	Wholemeal wrap with chicken, salad and hummus	Falafel or beans
Snack	Yoghurt with fruit	Soya yoghurt
Dinner	Salmon, new potatoes, broccoli and peas	Tofu or eggs
Drinks	Water, tea, coffee as usual	—

Sample long-run day (e.g. Sunday)

When	Example
2–3 hours before	Tested breakfast: toast or bagel with jam/honey and a banana, or porridge. Water or squash

When	Example
During (runs over ~90 min)	Carbohydrate you've practised: gels, chews, sports drink, or jelly sweets. Water as planned
Within a couple of hours after	Recovery meal with carbs + protein: beans on toast with cheese, or eggs, toast and fruit, or a smoothie and a sandwich
Dinner	Normal balanced dinner with a generous carb portion: pasta with tomato, veg and lentil/meat sauce

Race week

Day	Focus	Example meals
Mon–Wed	Eat normally. You're running less, so don't overeat	As your everyday day
Thu–Fri	Carbs become the biggest part of each meal; go easier on very high-fibre or very fatty foods if they upset you	Breakfast: porridge + honey + banana. Lunch: jacket potato with beans. Dinner: rice, chicken/tofu, veg
Sat (night before)	A familiar, carb-based dinner, not late, not huge, not spicy	Pasta with a simple tomato sauce and bread
Race morning	Tested breakfast 2–4 hours before the start; sip water	Bagel with jam + banana, or porridge
During the race	Exactly what you practised on long runs	Gels/chews/sports drink as planned
After	Drink, then a snack, then a proper meal	Whatever you're craving, plus fluids

Golden rule: nothing new on race day.

Sample week (Finish strong plan, build phase)

Day	Training	Food focus
Mon	Rest	Everyday day
Tue	Easy run	Everyday day, snack before the run
Wed	Strength	Everyday day, protein at each meal
Thu	Workout	Bit more carb at lunch; recovery snack after
Fri	Rest / strength	Everyday day
Sat	Short easy run	Carb-based dinner before the long run
Sun	Long run	Long-run day (above)

Supplements

A food-first approach suits most first-time marathoners. Only a few supplements have good evidence, and some products carry contamination risks. Get professional advice before taking any.

Signs to talk to your GP

Feeling constantly tired, getting ill often, frequent injuries, losing weight without meaning to, changes to periods, or anxiety around food. These can be signs of not eating enough for your training.

General information only, not medical or dietary advice. Sources: NHS Eatwell Guide; AND/DC/ACSM joint position paper "Nutrition and Athletic Performance" (2016); IOC consensus statement on dietary supplements (2018); ACSM position stand "Exercise and

Fluid Replacement" (2007); BDA food fact sheet "Sport and exercise". None of these bodies has reviewed or endorsed this plan. RunClub Directory · runclubdirectory.co.uk