

# Healthy Habits Tips from Coach Carrie

## Tip 1

### Stay hydrated all day long!

We recommend carrying a 20-30 ounce bottle of ice water around with you at school. Drink it throughout the day and finish it before practice. Fill it again before practice and finish it by the end of practice. Drink more with dinner when you get home.

Staying hydrated will help you feel energized, perform at your best, and aid in recovery. It is non-negotiable. To train and compete like we do, it is absolutely essential!

Make it a priority and encourage your teammates as well!

## Tip 2:

### Pre-race fueling

Amount and timing is very important

You want to make sure you have a nutritious meal the night before, preferably consisting of food you are familiar with and know agrees with you.

Shoot for getting a solid 8-9 hours of sleep. For example this week you will wake up early for a 6:30 arrival time. So you'll need to be in bed by 9:30 at the latest. 😊

You can plan your breakfast the night before. Make sure you have everything you need. Eat it between 6-6:30. Breakfast ideas pre meet are foods that easily digest. Ideas:

Toast or bagel with peanut butter or honey

banana with PB

oatmeal with banana

Nothing too filling, just enough to give you some energy.

If you are racing at 8am or 8:30 am this would be your last food before the race.

If you are racing at 9, 9:30 or 10 you can have a few bites of a bar or fruit snacks 60 minutes before your race. Your goal is to keep the blood sugar up but not be full.

Keep sipping water or sports drink throughout the morning before your race.

### **Tip 3:**

**Sleep is the absolute BEST recovery tool!** Without question!! You need to make it a priority!

Teenagers need 8-9 hours a night. You need to count 9 hours backwards from when you need to wake up and plan to be in bed by then.

When you sleep your body releases human growth hormone which helps to lay down new muscle and bone which is required in recovery from exercise!

Sleep also helps regulate other vital hormones.

You can have solid workouts, do all the little exercises, do all the pre and post rolling/stretching and eat well but without sleep you will suffer and leave a lot of potential progress on the table. You'll increase your chance of injury, burnout and overtraining!

### **Tip 4:**

**Importance of wearing sunscreen, a hat, and sunglasses to protect yourself from the sun**

Sun damage to our skin and eyes is cumulative. We want to prevent that. We recommend applying a waterproof/sweatproof sunscreen before your run. Pack sunscreen and lip balm with sunscreen in a ziplock bag and have it in your backpack.

You should all have a pair of sunglasses as well. An inexpensive brand that many of us wear are linked here: [Goodr](#)

Wearing a loose fitting long sleeve white running shirt is also a great option for skin protection [HERE](#) and heat reflection. Another option is arm sleeves. There are many options including some with SPF rating. I'll link some here: [arm coolers with UV protection](#)

All athletes have been provided with a baseball hat and it is a great option for protecting their head and face.

### **Tip 5:**

**Book recommendations to build your mindset**

I highly recommend filling your mind with inspiring running stories and informative books about technique, strengthening and injury prevention.

I created an Amazon list of book recommendations to inspire you :[HERE](#)

## **Tip 6**

### **Foot and skincare**

Toenails:

- You need to keep your toenails trimmed regularly. They should not be longer than your toe. This prevents the nails from hitting the end of your shoes and causing bruising under your nail or causing an ingrown toenail.

Running often creates chafing. Two products I recommend are Bodyglide or Aquaphor. Options found [HERE](#).

Recommended places to apply Bodyglide or Aquaphor

1. Back of your upper arms. Oftentimes the arm will rub on the seam of a shirt or jog bra.
2. Inner thighs - same issue, these areas rub together or rub on the seam of your shorts
3. Your feet. This can help prevent blisters. Apply to the foot then put on your socks.
4. Anywhere with a rough tag on the shirt or shorts. Ideally you cut out the tag, but if you can't, then add body glide or aquaphor to the skin near the tag to avoid chafing

Another option to prevent foot/toe blisters is to wear running specific socks. They have features like compression, cushioning in certain areas, varying degrees of thickness, and some are double-layer so the layers slide on each other and not your foot sliding on the sock causing friction. Some sock options: [HERE](#)

You can also find running specific socks and chafing prevention items locally at Forward Motion Sports in Danville, Fleet Feet in Pleasanton, and Sports Basement in San Ramon.

## **Tip 7**

### **Getting your Ferritin levels ( Iron stores) checked and why it is important as a distance runner**

I will share a story we personally went through with our daughter. I hope the story will help someone here. During our daughter's senior year at Cal High, she had a great start to the season in all the early races. After EBAL she had trouble recovering. She felt really fatigued. Not the normal "during race" and "post race" fatigue. She explained it felt like deep fatigue. Exhaustion. She went to all practices in preparation for NCS. She thought she would be ok but NCS was rough. She was so out of breath. She did not look like herself at all. She qualified for state but was an absolute shell of her former self. We thought maybe she was anemic or had COVID. We took her to the doctor but her blood test came back as normal Hemoglobin and they determined she was not sick

with COVID.. They attributed it to anxiety. She worked to get her mind right for state. I wish I knew then what I know now. That poor kid willed herself to run the state meet completely exhausted and short of breath. She had to walk. The shortness of breath was so extreme. She muscled her way through to the finish. We vowed we would figure this out for her. Many friends and other coaches gave us ideas on what they thought was happening as they had seen it before with their kids or athletes. They recommended we have her ferritin checked. They were shocked to hear she was not already taking an iron supplement. The next week the doctor agreed to check her ferritin levels. They were dangerously low. The doctor immediately took her off running and placed her on iron supplementation. It took 3 months to move the ferritin levels up to a reasonable range and 6 months to an acceptable range. Now 3 years later as a collegiate runner, she still takes iron to keep her ferritin stores up and her entire team takes iron supplements. This is a very common problem with distance runners. Men and women.

Since this happened to us I have done more investigation to inform myself so that I can assist our athletes. My research has found, besides training deficiencies, lack of fitness, and injuries, **low iron levels in runners is one of the most common reasons for poor results during workouts and races.** It presents itself as fatigue and shortness of breath. This is not typical fatigue and shortness of breath from working hard, it is more intense than that and at times the shortness of breath can occur when you are not training.

## **How Runners Lose Iron**

Runners lose more iron than non-runners for a multitude of reasons.

**Through your feet** – First, a process called foot strike hemolysis occurs in runners, especially those who run high mileage. Foot strike hemolysis is a process where red blood cells are damaged when the foot hits the ground, thus reducing your hemoglobin levels.

**Through sweat** – Iron is lost through sweating. While the amount of iron loss isn't staggering, for a runner working out in hot and humid conditions, the losses can easily add up.

**Through the intestines** – Loss of iron through the GI tract (primarily the stomach or large intestine) is a problem for some athletes. Iron loss through the GI tract is fairly minor, but there may be a cumulative effect over months of running that leads to iron deficiency.

**Female runners** – Finally, female runners have an especially difficult time maintaining proper iron levels since they also lose iron during menstruation.

If you are worried that you might be iron deficient, you should schedule an appointment with your physician for a blood test. It's a simple test that most doctors would be willing to provide if you tell them you're running a lot of miles and feeling more fatigued than usual. Even if you are not iron deficient, you can establish a good baseline for your iron levels, which could help you identify an iron problem down the road.

Attached is a good article that also explains this in detail:

<https://uofmhealthwest.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Sports-Med-Ferritin-article-Oct-2021-1.pdf>

### **Tip 8**

#### **How to increase your iron stores (ferritin levels) through food**

Last week we discussed the importance of getting your ferritin levels checked through a blood test. I had many parents and athletes reach out to me to let me know they got their levels checked and others who plan to. Many learned they were very low and likely the cause of the symptoms they have been feeling. I decided to follow up that post with one this week about how to increase iron stores through your diet.

While your body can store iron, it can't make iron. The only way to get iron is by consuming (eating) it.

## **What foods contain iron?**

There are 2 types of iron in food:

1. heme iron(animal products) — this is easily absorbed by the body
2. non-heme iron (non animal products) — this is harder for your body to absorb

Heme iron can be found in:

- meat — beef, lamb, pork
- poultry — chicken, turkey, and eggs
- seafood — salmon, sardines and tuna
- organ meats — liver, kidney and pate

### Plant-based sources of non-heme iron

Plant foods containing non-heme iron can give you iron too. If you follow a plant-based diet, you will need to eat about 80% more iron to meet your dietary requirements.

Good sources include:

- iron-fortified bread and breakfast cereal
- nuts and seeds
- dried fruit
- wholemeal pasta and bread
- legumes — such as mixed beans, baked beans, lentils and chickpeas
- dark leafy green vegetables — such as spinach, silver beet and broccoli
- tofu

## How can I get enough iron in my diet?

How you prepare food, and which foods you eat together, can affect how much iron your body absorbs.

For example, eating foods rich in [vitamin C](#) can help you absorb more iron. These include:

- citrus fruits — such as oranges and lemons
- tomatoes
- berries
- kiwi fruit
- melons
- green leafy vegetables
- peppers

Try eating these foods, uncooked, at the same time as iron-rich foods. You can also drink orange juice with your meals or take a vitamin C supplement.

Some things can reduce your iron absorption, such as:

- coffee
- tea
- red wine (both alcoholic and non-alcoholic)
- [calcium-rich foods](#) like milk or cheese
- [calcium](#) supplements
- some soybean-based foods

It's better to have these foods in between meals.

### Tip 9

#### Mental preparation

Runners often focus entirely on their physical training and neglect the mental aspect of the sport. Cross country running requires mental toughness as well as physical endurance. The ability to push through fatigue and discomfort is crucial. It also requires mental discipline and trust in your training to stick with your race and training plan. This mental preparation can be cultivated every day in practice when you trust the process, hold the prescribed paces, run easy on easy days, do all the stretching, rolling and strengthening on top of practicing pushing through periods of fatigue and doubt.

#### Some ideas to mentally prepare:

- **Visualization:** One of the most effective ways to prepare mentally is to visualize your race. Picture yourself moving through each section of the race with confidence. Visualize how you will respond to challenges like fatigue, being bumped or tripped, falling, or tough weather conditions.
- **Positive Self-Talk:** Develop a habit of positive self-talk during training and races. When fatigue sets in, repeat phrases like “I am strong,” “I’ve trained for this,” or “One step at a time.” Positive affirmations can boost your mental resilience.
- **Break It Down:** Instead of focusing on the entirety of a race or a long workout, break it down into manageable sections. Focus on getting through the next mile, the next interval, or even the next minute. This makes the challenge feel more achievable and keeps you mentally focused.

- **Mindfulness and Meditation:** Incorporate mindfulness or meditation into your routine to improve focus and reduce stress. Even just a few minutes a day of deep breathing exercises can improve mental clarity and reduce anxiety before races.

## **Tip 10**

### **Being prepared for the next day's run**

**A little planning and preparation goes a long way!! It decreases overall stress and sets you up for success.**

If you know you need to wake up early for practice or a meet, you should be doing the math in your head for the timeline of the morning. An example: If I need to be at practice at 6:00am, I know I need to leave my house at 5:40am and it takes me 45 minutes to get ready so I will set my alarm for 4:55am. I set multiple alarms as a back up. You can also put your alarm across the room as jumping out of bed to turn it off makes it harder to hit the snooze button. Being on time is important especially when you are part of a team or you are meeting a friend for a run. Don't be that friend who leaves a friend hanging at 6:00am.

The night before, do a "lay out" as we call it in our home. Set out your clothes, shoes, water bottle, and reflective gear/headlamp (if you are planning to run before sunrise) the night before to eliminate excuses and get out the door quickly. Have a quick simple breakfast/snack prepared also so you can eat as soon as you wake up. If you are going to a meet, have all your items packed in a backpack, place it by the door. Also place your folding chair, roller, towel, food and whatever you offered to bring to the meet ready by the door. This makes race morning so much easier for you and your parents. Personally, we have a checklist made for our practices and meets. Before we leave the house we make sure we have everything and it makes packing much easier.

If you are a coffee drinker ( this is for the parents on our team :- ) ) set your coffeemaker on automatic so your brew is ready when you wake up.