



HEIDI STRICKLER'S TOP 10 TIPS FOR HIGH SCHOOL RUNNERS AND PARENTS

1. ***EAT ENOUGH!!!!*** Most young athletes are chronically UNDERfueled due to (a) a school schedule that doesn't allow for frequent eating, (b) high energy needs from growth, academics, and training; and (c) not knowing how much food they really need. It is hard for a young athlete to chronically eat too much day in and day out, so there should not be fear around that. High school runners NEED to be in a positive energy balance (eating more energy than you are using).

2. This means *3 meals + 2-4 snacks daily, or eating every 2-4 hours.*

Example: breakfast, morning snack if possible (even if it has to be liquid due to not being allowed to eat in class such as juice, shelf stable milk, Gatorade, store-bought smoothies/shakes, etc), lunch, pre-practice snack, post-practice snack, dinner, evening snack before bed (to help with sleep, recovery, and hormonal health)

3. This also means aiming for getting *ALL 4 FOOD GROUPS* (carbs + fats/oils + proteins + color) with meals and *AT LEAST 3 FOOD GROUPS* with snacks.

4. Finally, eating enough also means nailing your meal timing and supporting your highest-energy deficits (those things you do that create the biggest energy debt) with adequate energy intake! This means *eating 10-90 minutes before training* (yes, this close to training!!!) and replenishing your energy stores/jumpstarting muscle recovery by *eating a snack or meal within 30 minutes of finishing!*

5. *There is no "right" or "wrong" choice* in terms of what specific foods you choose to eat to meet these 4 food groups (some days your carbs might come from rice or quinoa or whole grain bread or oatmeal and other days your carbs might come from a donut or Poptart or pizza or french fries). *There are not "good" and "bad" foods,* and there is not one food or group of foods that is "off limits" or that will ruin your health or fitness or performance. The one thing that **WILL** ruin your health, fitness, and performance is **UNDEREATING.**

6. *"Refined" and "high glycemic index" foods have a very important place at the athlete's table!* These types of carbohydrates (white breads/pastas/tortillas/wraps; white rice; snacks such as pretzels, goldfish, gram crackers, gummy candy, Poptarts; sugared breakfast cereal; granola/cereal bars such as Nutrigrain, Clif, Nature Valley Oats & Honey, Chewy fig bars; muffins; cookies like Oreos and Chips Ahoy all are easy-to-digest carbohydrates that provide athletes with quick energy that they need 15-30 minutes before exercise, and can also be great after exercise when paired with a protein source!

The quick carbs also help our bodies utilize protein for recovery more quickly!

Examples: chocolate milk; milk & cookies or a brownie; eggs and a donut; string cheese & pretzels; PBJ or PBH sandwich; homemade or store-bought trail mix with nuts, fruit, cereal/pretzels, and chocolate (optional); a hamburger and milkshake; a bowl of your favorite breakfast cereal with cow's milk; a bean and cheese quesadilla; yogurt and granola; etc.

7. *Food is fuel. But it is SO MUCH MORE than that!* It is also memories, and pleasure, and culture, and community, and convenience. We eat for so many reasons, and all of these reasons support our physical and mental health as athletes, students, and human beings!

8. *Weight is never the best or most reliable measure of health or performance!!!!* Your body is unique to you and there is truly no formula that exists that will accurately tell you your "ideal" body weight. Your ideal weight is your weight when you are eating adequately and not restricting amounts or types of foods, when you have energy for school, work, and exercise, when you are sleeping well, recovering well, and staying free from illness and injury. In the running world, we are told "lighter is faster." But I would argue that "stronger is faster" and "fueled is faster." The fueled athlete will be stronger, and the stronger athlete will be able to kick down the "lighter" athletes in the uphill grinds and sprint finishes. Fueled and stronger athletes also last longer, and are more consistent with training, because they are less prone to illness and injury.

Research actually shows that when comparing individuals in the United States, those that are the LOWEST body weight are more likely to suffer chronic illness, medical conditions, and early death compared to the individuals with the HIGHEST body weights. Obesity is not the greatest worry.

9. *Track your hydration status by looking at the color of your pee. You want to aim for pale lemonade.* If you do know your general body weight, you should be drinking a minimum of 50% of your body weight in fluid ounces, and a maximum of 100%. Example: I weigh ~135# so I should drink between ~70-140oz daily. Hydration could include water as well as milk, non-dairy milk, fruit juice, sports drinks (Gatorade), electrolyte drinks (Nuun), coconut water, herbal tea, etc.

10. *Runners, especially those who are plant-based or menstruating, are at risk for low iron and/or anemia.* If you have struggled with this in the past, or think you are now, consult a Registered Sports Dietitian or your doctor to learn about what your next steps should be. You should NEVER take iron supplements without blood work and talking to a medical professional first!

Questions? Want to work with me more? Email me at hkstrickler.sportsrd@gmail.com