

Eat Green, Keep Moving, and Think Positive Thoughts

Wellness experts share their secrets

by Lauren Antonucci, MS, RD

Earlier this year, I attended the annual Sports Cardiovascular and Wellness Nutritionist (SCAN) conference, a meeting of the minds of sports dietitians. Entitled "The Seven Wonders of Wellness," the meeting included three presentations of particular interest to runners who strive to healthfully and efficiently fuel our busy lives, foster a positive attitude toward our running, and continue to run into our later years.



Low-Carbon Diet for a Healthier Planet

Most runners, of course, care about what we put into our bodies. And more than ever these days, we also care about the impact of what we eat and drink on the world around us. Reducing our “carbon food footprint” can help keep our earth beautiful and viable for generations to come. In an enlightening talk, Kate Geagan, MS, RD, the self-proclaimed “green nutritionist” and the author of *Go Green Get Lean: Trim Your Waistline with the Ultimate Low-Carbon Footprint Diet*, shared some simple, healthy strategies for significantly reducing our carbon footprint through making wiser food choices.

Geagan reported that according to the Bon Appétit Management Company Foundation, which is dedicated to reducing food-related greenhouse gas emissions, one third of all such emissions result from meeting our planet’s food needs. That’s a sobering statistic, but an empowering one as well, because it gives us the opportunity to improve the health of the planet through the food choices we make each day.

According to Geagan, the largest contributors to our carbon food footprint are beef, processed foods, disposable items such as plastic and paper cups, plates, utensils, take-out containers, food shipping, and consumer food waste. She offered these suggestions for making a positive difference:



Eat less beef. It takes seven pounds of corn and 2,500 gallons of water to produce a one-pound weight gain in beef cattle. What’s more, the methane gas produced by cows is 21 times more warming to the atmosphere than CO₂ emissions.

You don’t have to swear off beef forever to make an impact. If you eat beef frequently, try substituting chicken, fish, or a vegetarian meal one or two days each week. Nuts, soy products, beans, and legumes are other choices that can help meet our protein needs while keeping the planet healthy.

Use fewer disposable items. Americans discard 60 million plastic bottles every day and 100 million aluminum cans annually. You can help change these numbers by buying an in-home water filter and eliminating (or at least curtailing) your use of bottled water, which must be packaged, shipped, and stored before you drink it. Carry your water and other drinks in stainless-steel bottles—it’ll help your wallet as well as the planet. Bring a washable plate, bowl, and set of utensils to work.

When possible, eat locally and organic. The average food item will travel 1,500 miles—farther than the average American family travels on vacation each year—before it reaches your table. Frequent farmer’s markets and buy locally whenever you can. Geagan reported that buying local and organic food saves the planet 30 to 60 percent of the fossil fuel otherwise used.

Don’t waste food! One quarter of all edible available food is thrown away at the consumer level. I almost didn’t believe this statistic until I started paying close attention to my family’s habits: In just one day, we tossed a quarter of my son’s uneaten breakfast oatmeal, an apple that got “too soft” in the back of the fridge, a piece of fish left from dinner three nights earlier, some wilted lettuce, and my other son’s half-eaten yogurt from yesterday. It adds up fast! We all need to strive to buy only what we’ll consume, eat what we do buy, and safely store the rest—that is, freeze leftovers before they grow mold in the fridge! If you have a garden, compost your leftover food waste; if you don’t, donate the waste to a local community farm.

Re-think your splurges. It takes 2,200 fossil-fuel calories to produce a zero-calorie bottled beverage. Try buying powdered drink mixes instead to save packaging, energy, and waste. Consider the impact not only on your health and wallet but also the planet; it’s amazing how often the goals of health, thrift, and reduced carbon food footprint are compatible.

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The Good, the Bad, and the Differences of Running After 40

Aging is a fact of life. We can either adopt the philosophy that, like good wine, we get better with age, or we can be defeatists and convince ourselves that we're "over the hill." Runners aren't defeatists, and Chris Roosenbloom, PhD, a professor of nutrition at Georgia State University in Atlanta, gave runners a lot to be optimistic about as she shared some of the truths about being a masters (over-40) athlete.

Age does bring real physiological changes, Roosenbloom said. VO_2 max, a measure of aerobic capacity, decreases by about 5ml/kg/minute each decade beginning at about age 25. Maximum heart rate also decreases with each passing year, as does peak strength, which for most people peaks at about age 25. Resting metabolic rate (RMR), the number of calories the body burns while at rest, also gradually declines with age.

The good news is that by maintaining their training volume, masters athletes can retain about 50 percent more of their VO_2 max than nonathletes. They also curb the decreases in RMR and are therefore much more likely than their sedentary counterparts to avoid the typical one- to three-pound weight gain that most U.S. adults see each year. Masters runners have also been shown to delay disability by seven years compared to those who don't exercise.



Roosenbloom offered a few suggestions for masters runners:

Post-menopausal women have a slightly lower capacity for glycogen storage and slightly increased glycogen utilization with endurance exercise. This means it's important for older women runners to maintain their total daily carbohydrate intake and their intake of carbohydrates during exercise despite their slightly lower total daily calorie needs.

Masters athletes have an impaired thirst response, according to studies at Penn State University, meaning that they need to pay close attention to their hydration needs. They also acclimate to hot weather more slowly than younger athletes and recover more slowly if they become dehydrated. Roosenbloom recommended that masters athletes allow extra time to adjust to warm conditions, possibly cutting workouts by 50 percent in the early summer and increasing as tolerated.

Older athletes have lower overall intakes of calcium, iron, zinc, magnesium, and vitamin D than younger runners, Roosenbloom said. It's also likely that masters athletes have higher needs for many of the B vitamins, vitamin D, and vitamin E. She recommended that masters athletes eat a wide variety of nutrient-dense foods—those with lots of nutrition in each bite—such as low-fat dairy, whole grains, lean meat and/or beans, nuts, and seeds.

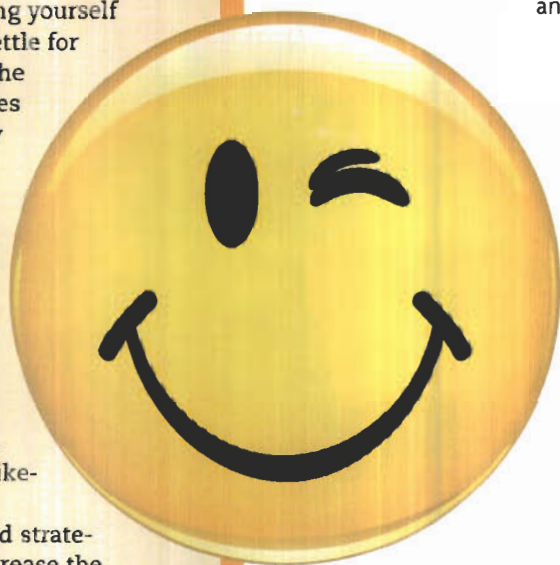
Overall, Roosenbloom said, it's great to be a masters athlete, and far better than being sedentary at any age. As a group, fit older adults have better lipoprotein (cholesterol) levels, lower percentage of body fat, better blood pressure control, and higher levels of vitamin D when compared to sedentary people of the same age. However, because runners over age 50 tend to have higher rates of overuse injuries and slower rates of recovery from injury than runners in their 30s and 40s, they should be sure to get adequate rest and recovery and to rehydrate between exercise sessions for continued longevity in the sport.

Take Care of You, So You Can Take Care of Everything Else

In an engaging presentation, wellness coach Lauve Metcalfe shed light on the importance of framing our life expectations in ways that allow us to achieve our goals. She used the acronym SPECIES (Social, Physical, Emotional, Career, Intellectual, Environmental, and Spiritual) to describe what she calls the seven "wellness dimensions" that contribute to life balance and happiness. Life balance is achieved, she says, by paying attention to these seven dimensions.

Metcalfe urged members of the audience to ask what brings us joy, what gets us excited, and how we can best use our talents. I believe that asking these questions as they relate to running can help us stay connected to what really matters to us in our sport. For example, if great performances bring you joy, keep challenging yourself in training and don't settle for less than your best at the races. If new experiences thrill you, seek out new distances and venues. If you have a talent for leading and inspiring others, get a friend running or consider becoming a certified coach.

Finally, Metcalfe presented her Degree of Success scale, which she uses to gauge the likelihood of success in an endeavor. She suggested strategies at each level to increase the odds of success.



- If your attitude is *I won't or I can't*, you have a **0-percent chance of success.**

Strategy: Seek help from a coach or teacher.

- If your attitude is *I don't know how*, you have a **25-percent chance of success.**

Strategy: Develop your skills and seek appropriate mentors.

- If your attitude is *I want to or I wish I could*, you have a **50-percent chance of success.**

Strategy: Actively gather support and encouragement, and seek opportunities.

- If your attitude is *I believe, I can, or I will*, you have a **75-percent chance of success.**

Strategy: Continue to practice, further educate yourself, and deepen support.

- If your attitude is *I am doing it*, you have a **100-percent chance of success.**

Strategy: Repeat your positive mantra, continue to succeed, and monitor and adapt as needed.

The three topics provided me with plenty of food for thought, and I hope they do for you, too. May we all make food choices for a healthier planet, approach our running with the goal of staying healthy into our 40s, 50s, and beyond, and maintain a can-do attitude in running and in life! ■