

The “Sweet” effect of running

By Gurmeet Soni Bhalla | August 6, 2019



Gurmeet Bhalla Soni talks about the benefits of running for **diabetic** people and those looking to lose weight.

Running as an activity offers us a ton of benefits – from providing the basic exercise to stay fit, to **losing weight**, even improving cardiovascular activity or very simply – to making us feel good. Running can be especially helpful for people with type 2 diabetes as it increases the sensitivity to insulin thereby combating insulin resistance. **Runners** with type 2 diabetes, however, have to make some adjustments to their schedule, diet, lifestyle, and outlook in order to reap the benefits of running.

If you are overweight and run the risk of type 2 diabetes, taking up running is well worth the effort as it will help in weight management, improve insulin sensitivity and help maintain blood sugars. While there is no risk of hypoglycemia (a condition caused by low blood sugar levels) if the blood sugars are under control, you should be mindful of the extra consumption of calorie-rich bars, drinks and gels since extra calories will negate the effect of weight loss.

Participating in moderate exercise while taking certain oral antidiabetic medication(s) generally leads to a gradual reduction in blood sugar that’s unlikely to result in hypoglycemia. There is no special fuelling needed for a moderate to a long distance run. The regular energy drinks, gels on the run are good enough to make up for the loss of fuel and maintain blood sugars. Also, a diabetic body is fat adaptive and hence will utilise fuel from body fat without causing hypoglycemia.

Here are a few tips for runners with diabetes.

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In general

1. If you are on oral antidiabetic medicines or insulin, you may run the risk of hypoglycemia. So, it’s always recommended that you check with your physician before taking up running as a regular activity.
2. You should always ensure you carry more than an adequate supply of sugar, either in the form of glucose tablets or sugary drinks.
3. Carrying medical identification is essential if you are running for longer than a 60-minute period, as well as informing a loved one that you are going out for a run as hypoglycemia is always a risk. A running partner, alternatively, would be ideal.
4. Runners on medications especially insulin, sulphonylureas (oral medication that controls blood sugar) need to make adjustments to their diet and insulin dosing before, during and after the activity.
5. If your blood glucose levels are high, to begin with, you may also run a risk of dehydration, so it is important to stabilise the sugar levels before starting the activity.
6. Runners must take care of their feet as any injury, ingrown toenails or ulcers can cause damage to the feet. Wearing comfortable footwear is of the utmost importance.

Short Runs

A short distance run of 30 – 45 mins can be done several times a week and you do not run the risk of hypoglycemia. A small snack like a peanut butter toast, oats, banana can provide suitable fuel for the run if your blood sugar is under control. If your blood sugar levels are higher, this snack may not be needed, however, if the levels are lower, a sugary drink that stabilises the blood sugar is needed before the running activity is commenced.

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Long Runs

A long run is classified as one which requires over 1 to 2 hours of activity at a slower pace. Long runs are good for a diabetic person who has developed good fitness and routine from short runs. One should be careful about hydration and food intake as such prolonged activity can result in hypoglycemia. A gel or a sandwich midway at 1-hour mark or so is sufficient fuel for the body. Many runners benefit from long runs as it decreases their dosage on long-acting insulin and oral diabetic drugs. A wearable blood glucose monitoring device is now available in the market that can read blood glucose at any point in time. This can be used on long runs to assess blood sugars before, during and after the activity and helps to plan necessary hydration and food breaks.

Marathons

Marathons are a culmination of intense training and should be considered after requisite preparation is done. One needs to reduce the dose of long-acting insulins the night before so that there is no danger of hypos. Having an energy bar before the race and an energy gel every 8 to 10 kms maintains the blood glucose level and provides enough fuel to the brain to run the distance. The consumption of too much liquid makes digestion much harder, so hydrating often with little amounts is the best way to go about for marathons. Refuelling your muscles following the run will help your body recover and a big meal combined with a reduction in the insulin throughout the day will prevent hypos later in the evening.

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