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CEREAL OFFENDERS

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COULD UNDIAGNOSED
FOOD INTOLERANCE
BE AFFECTING YOUR
RUNNING PERFORMANCE?

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In the run-up to race day, I tend to eat more healthily and take better care of myself. But despite my best intentions, I recently started to notice the effect wheat was having on my running performance. Every time I loaded up on carbs before a big run, I felt heavy and sluggish the next day, and even suffered occasional stomach cramps. While this wasn't preventing me from carrying out my normal daily routine, feeling like a ten-tonne sloth was starting to affect my running confidence.

On long runs or race day, many runners – including the inspirational Paula Radcliffe – still suffer from unexplained stomach problems or the dreaded 'runner's trots'. Paula famously dropped out of the Athens Olympic Marathon in 2004, due to stomach cramps brought on by an undiagnosed food intolerance. While a small number of the population suffer from food allergies, according to Allergy UK as many as 45 per cent of the UK population suffers from food intolerances, with symptoms ranging from migraines to skin rashes

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and digestive problems.

Although tummy trouble can also be associated with dehydration or running too soon after eating, if you regularly suffer from symptoms such as nausea, bloating, abdominal pain, diarrhoea or even unexplained fatigue, a food intolerance may be at the root of your problem. But what should you do if you are worried about the impact your diet is having on your running performance?

ALLERGY VERSUS INTOLERANCE

Food allergy is less common than food intolerance and normally causes symptoms within a few minutes of eating the offending food. 'When the food is eaten or sometimes when it comes into contact with the skin, it triggers an "abnormal immune system response", where the body mistakes particular foods as harmful,' explains Shweta Bhasin, dietitian at the Bupa Cromwell Hospital. 'Most food allergy reactions are mild, but some can be very serious and even fatal.'

The foods that most commonly cause an allergic reaction are fish,

it's easy to dismiss worrying signs if they don't come in the immediate form of an allergic reaction, diagnosing a food intolerance could be the difference between a tough race and a perfect PB!

INTOLERANCE AND RUNNING

Wheat, dairy, eggs and yeast are often the main suspects, but the food most likely to negatively affect your running is gluten. 'People with this intolerance are likely to be at risk of low energy levels, due to inadequate nutritional intake because they are avoiding certain foods,' says Shweta. 'This can be overcome by ensuring



shellfish, nuts and peanuts, but people can have allergic reactions to all manner of foods, including gluten, wheat and dairy, some fruits and even the chemical preservatives and additives found in processed food.

A food intolerance is much more common and, while it's not life threatening, if undiagnosed it could hinder your running performance. 'You can get irritable bowel syndrome and psychosomatic factors,' says Shweta. Common food intolerances include wheat, gluten, lactose and yeast, and individuals may be intolerant to several foods.

The problem is it can be several hours or even days before the particular food triggers a negative response, so it can be hard to pinpoint what food is affecting you. But while

you eat plenty of high-energy gluten-free foods, such as potatoes, rice, quinoa, plantain, green banana, and gluten-free bread and pasta.'

Training can bring on symptoms such as stomach cramps, diarrhoea and fatigue. If your symptoms are occasional, it's most likely nothing to worry about, but if you do notice a dip in your running performance after eating certain foods, or you regularly suffer from nausea, bloating, abdominal pain, fatigue or diarrhoea, it could be an undiagnosed food intolerance, so it's worth getting checked out by your GP.

TEMPORARY INTOLERANCE

While undergoing increased intense training, your body can also become more sensitive. Feeling run down and



under pressure could lead to temporary intolerances, as Lucinda Bruce-Gardyne, author of *How To Cook For Food Allergies* (Rodale, £16.99) and founder of gluten-free company Genius Foods, explains. 'Your body becomes more sensitive when you're doing more exercise,' she says. 'There are certain foods you could eat normally that don't suit you when you're in a heightened state of activity. I think bread is one of those. Your body suddenly doesn't want heavy, doughy food that's going to take time to digest. So you don't necessarily have to be gluten intolerant.'

Lucinda started Genius Foods when her son was diagnosed with severe gluten intolerance, but as a runner, Lucinda found even if you don't suffer from food intolerances, gluten-free bread still provides a perfect bread substitute for all-important carbo-loading. 'Genius bread is a great alternative to normal bread, as it's much lighter to eat and digest,' she explains. 'The gluten in bread is a very strong elastic protein, which is difficult to absorb. Gluten-free bread doesn't contain that, so it's digested easily. It's perfect for snacks and to keep the carb load up.'

INTOLERANCE DIAGNOSIS

There are blood and skin tests that can accurately confirm the presence or absence of a food allergy. But the only reliable way to identify a food intolerance is to do an elimination and challenge diet, where you remove the suspected food from your diet, see if symptoms improve and then try reintroducing the food. If symptoms persist, intolerance is likely, so you'll need to remove the offending food from your diet permanently. Speak to your GP if you're unsure.

FOOD SUBSTITUTES

There is no cure for food intolerance; the best way to prevent flare-ups is to identify the food that causes the symptoms and then avoid it in future. The good news is there are many tasty substitutes to common food intolerance culprits, and you can easily maintain a healthy diet and be a happy runner if you're prepared to cook from scratch.

Food writer Pippa Kendrick first discovered she had food intolerances following a series of operations that left her with a damaged digestive system and severe intolerances to

A nut allergy can have severe consequences

wheat, dairy, soy, eggs and yeast. Creating recipes for multiple food intolerances led her to launch her blog www.theintolerantgourmet.com, and her cookbook, *The Intolerant Gourmet* (Collins, £20), followed.

'I felt driven to write the kind of cookbook that I had wanted to own when first diagnosed,' says Pippa. 'Ten years ago, there was very little in the way of cookery books for food intolerances and what did exist was dour and earnest. I always felt food was about sharing, family, friends and love, and I wanted to show this was possible regardless of any food restrictions.'

So, if you do discover you have a food intolerance, don't dismay. There are now lots of tasty, intolerance-free recipes available to persuade any runner to put the extra miles in! ■

TOLERATE THIS!

TRY THESE TASTY INTOLERANCE-FREE SNACKS TO SUPPLEMENT YOUR RUNNING

GLUTEN-FREE TOAST WITH PEANUT BUTTER
Simple but effective, peanut butter makes a perfect high-energy snack.

RAW VEG OR GLUTEN-FREE RICE CAKES WITH HOUMOUS
Houmous goes with almost anything and makes a perfect high-energy running snack.

GLUTEN-FREE FRUIT LOAF
Sweet, fruity and filling, fruit loaf is great for carbo-loading and sugar energy.

HOMEMADE FLAPJACKS
Use gluten-free oats and a selection of dried fruit and nuts to create your own energy bars!

FROZEN GRAPES
Simply pop them in the freezer for a fruity and refreshing post-run snack.