

# SportsNutrition

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## The Athlete's Kitchen

Dear Nancy—I am a 24 year old grad student who runs 6 miles a day. I take many, many vitamins each day, and am wondering if this is all a big hoax. I follow what books and doctors have told me along the way and am just trying to maintain my health. The pills are not only a hassle to take but are also expensive. Do I really need all of these?

1 Super-B complex (supposedly for energy)	Cost/pill	10¢
1 Centrum Daily Multivitamin (because doc says so)		15¢
3 Citracal + D tablets (helps build bone)		45¢
1 Magnesium (helps absorb calcium)		35¢
2 Glucosamine-Chondroitin tabs (supposedly helps joints)		75¢
1 Conjugated Linoleic Acid (build muscle and lose fat?)		30¢
1 E (supposedly helps skin and nails)		7¢
2 Cinnamon tabs (supposedly helps blood sugar)		25¢
1 Flaxseed oil capsule (doctor said so)		6¢
1 Fish oil capsule (doctor said we need Omega 3)		10¢

I try to eat well and exercise. A typical day looks like this:

BREAKFAST: packet oatmeal + an orange      Calories: 200

RUN (after b'fast): 6 miles-5 days/wk; lift- 2/wk      (-600)

SNACK (post-run): light string cheese + 20 almonds.      250

LUNCH: large salad, dry + can of tuna + light yogurt.      350

SNACK: Luna Bar      200

DINNER: large salad, dry + 2 Boca Burgers + cooked veg      400

I inevitably end up grazing in the afternoon and evening on goldfish crackers, cookies, trail mix, hot cocoa, candy bars. Every night without fail, I succumb to some sort of chocolate bar or frozen yogurt. Or both. Writing all this down makes me feel like I eat too much... Help!!

Dear Jessica—You spend ~\$75 per month on nutrients you could eat at meals. Here's my assessment: At 5'4", 120 lbs., and running 6 miles a day, your body needs about 2,400 calories. In ~1,500 wholesome calories, you can consume the nutrients you need. In 2,400 calories, you have the opportunity to eat abundant nutrients, and skip the pills.

To your detriment, your skimpy meals account for only 1,400 calories. No wonder you graze a lot; you are *hungry*! To abate the snacks (and cravings for sweets), experiment with eating about 600 calories of wholesome food at four meals a day: breakfast, first lunch (10-11 a.m.), *lunch #2* (3-4 p.m.), and dinner. Why just snack at 10:00 and 3:00 when you are hungry enough to eat a meal? By changing your grazing into an early lunch, then a second lunch (a sandwich? or yogurt/granola/nuts?), you'll boost your intake of the same vitamins/minerals you take as a supplement.

My question for you is: Why do *you* think you need to take so many pills? My guess is you want to boost your energy. Assuming that is your case, look instead at your eating patterns—not nutrient deficiencies—as contributing to low energy. You under-eat in the active part of your day. How about fueling your body better by day, eating less (dessert) at night, and reducing the need for supplements?

## Do I need so many vitamin pills?

- If you want to take a daily multivitamin for health insurance, that's fine. But first read food labels. Your highly fortified Luna Bar snack is a vitamin pill in itself; don't duplicate!
- No need to take Super-B complex; you already get 100% of the B-vitamins in the Luna Bar (and/or the multi-vitamin). While B-vitamins help convert food into energy, I'll bet your lack of energy is due to lack of fuel, not lack of vitamins.
- The 3 Citracal + D tablets offers the daily requirement for calcium (1,000 mg) and D. You can get that by enjoying a low-fat calcium-rich food at 3 of your 4 daily meals. Simply cook your oatmeal in 1 cup milk (300 mg Calcium), enjoy a lunchtime cup of yogurt (300 mg Ca) and 8 oz. milk (300 mg Ca) with dinner. An active woman can easily afford to spend 100 calories per meal on a lowfat calcium-rich food each day.
- Magnesium is already in the Luna Bar, to say nothing of foods like peanut butter, nuts, greens (and dark chocolate!). How about peanut butter on a bagel for breakfast post-run?
- More research is needed to determine if Glucosamine-Chondroitin tabs will slow joint degeneration. Stay tuned.
- CLA is not the answer for fat loss. To lose fat, fuel more by day, and then eat less dessert at night. Theoretically, eating 100 to 200 calories less at night can lead to 10 to 20 pounds of fat loss in a year. CLA is also not the answer for building muscles; lifting weights does that job.
- Do you really think one single nutrient (E) can make your nails and skin better? Your body needs the whole package of nutrients supplied by a variety of wholesome foods. You can get vitamin E from almonds, peanut butter, olive oil, soy milk, avocado—and your (fortified) Luna Bar.
- Cinnamon tabs might help stabilize blood glucose, but exercise does a far better job. If you have swings in blood sugar, you likely have run out of fuel. More breakfast and lunch is the solution, not Cinnamon tabs. Alternatively, you could put 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon in your oatmeal.
- Flax is a weak source of omega-3s; fish is more powerful in terms of heart health. The American Heart Association recommends eating 8 ounces of oily fish a week (light tuna, salmon, sardines). Get hooked on fish, not pills!

To date, every major medical organization recommends protecting your health with fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lowfat dairy, lean meats and plant proteins—not pills. For help enhancing your intake of powerhouse foods, go to [www.SCANdpg.org](http://www.SCANdpg.org); use the referral network to find a sports dietitian. The cost of the personalized consult will be far less than the ~\$1,000/year you spend on pills!

Nancy Clark, MS, RD, CSSD (Board Certified Specialist in Sports Dietetics) offers private consultations to casual and competitive athletes in her practice at Healthworks, the premier fitness center in Chestnut Hill MA (617-383-6100). Her *Sports Nutrition Guidebook*, *Food Guide for Marathoners*, and *Cyclist's Food Guide* are available via [www.nancyclarkrd.com](http://www.nancyclarkrd.com). See also [sportsnutritionworkshop.com](http://sportsnutritionworkshop.com).

### One example of a nutrient-dense sports diet

This menu builds on what Jessica typically eats, but trades the snack-calories into wholesome foods at substantial meals. When choosing your menu, try to vary your meals so you end up with 35 different foods in a week. The more variety of foods you eat, the more variety of nutrients you get.

#### Breakfast (600 calories, divided pre- / post-exercise)

*Approximate calories*

1 packet oatmeal	100
1 cup lowfat milk*	100 *cook oatmeal in milk
1 orange	100
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Large apple	150
2 string cheeses	150

#### First lunch (600 calories)

Raw veggies (baby carrots, pepper)	50
2 slices hearty sandwich bread	200
1 can tuna*	200 *limit to 2 cans/week
2 Tbsp lite mayo	100 to limit mercury intake

#### Second lunch (munched throughout the afternoon, as desired)

Luna Bar	200
Yogurt, lowfat	150
30 almonds	250

#### Dinner/pm snack

Large colorful salad	100
1/2 Tbsp Olive oil in dressing	50
2 Boca Burgers	200
Bowl of cooked veggies	100
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Hot cocoa made with milk	150