

Running Snacks – Gels vs. Chews

There are so many different types of fuel out there – how do you know which one is best?

The best way to find the running snack products that will effectively fuel your run is basically trial and error. Keep a training journal so you know what you ate and when, so you know how your body reacted to each different brand and fuel type.

Here is a basic overview of the two main types of during-the-run nutrition products and snacks so you're not going in uninformed.

GELS

Energy gels can be tricky – for a lot of people, it's a "I guess I can tolerate it" kind of thing. It's very rare that we hear people saying, "OMG I love gels they're so yummy"! Luckily, over the past few year's companies like GU, Clif, and Honey Stinger have come out with some interesting flavors to keep it fresh.

What's it like?

Consistency varies from brand to brand but think of somewhere in between a smoothie and pudding. Flavors generally fall into two camps: the vanilla/chocolate/coffee flavors; and the fruity flavors.

Common brands:

GU, Honey Stinger, Clif and Maurten are the dominant brands.

Honey Stinger uses honey and tapioca syrup as its primary sugar source, most varieties are organic. **Clif is organic and doesn't have too many ingredients.** **GU** uses dual fuels (maltodextrin and fructose) which allow you to consume and absorb more energy.

How should I take them?

Have you ever heard the advice, "if you wait until you're thirsty to drink water, it's too late? Same idea. You want to make sure your muscles never get to during your race, because it's hard to dig yourself out of that hole. The general rule of thumb is to take your first gel 45-60 minutes in, and then take one every 45 minutes after that (we're going under the assumption here that you have eaten a quality breakfast about 90 minutes before race). Take them with water – it will help the simple sugars absorb into the bloodstream more quickly. And don't take them with a sports drink – this way too much sugar for the body to handle at once.

Basic Brand Comparison

GU: thinnest consistency, requires no chewing. Just shoot it and chase with water. Smallest packing, making it easy to carry. Largest flavor assortment we carry – you'll find your standard chocolate, vanilla, fruit flavors: but you'll also find varieties like Salted Watermelon, Peanut Butter, and Cucumber Mint, among others.

Clif Shot: Thickest consistency. The chocolate flavor is delicious but reminds us of frosting.

Honey Stinger: the sweetest of the group, and the main ingredients are honey and tapioca syrup – a little more natural. Consistency is between GU and Clif shots, so it seems to be easy to take down mid-run. Flavor assortment is simple but effective, with a small mix of fruity as well as your standard chocolate and vanilla.

Maurten Gel: Encapsulates 25 grams of carbohydrates in patented hydrogel technology. Built with just 6 ingredients – no added colors or preservatives. Very gut friendly but also bland tasting.

CHEWS

What's it like?

Similar to chewy fruit snacks. Some are firmer, and some are stickier. And then there are sport beans – which are basically just jellybeans.

Basic Brand Comparison

Stinger Chews: the main ingredients are honey and tapioca syrup. These are the easiest ones to chew on- each chew is about the size of a quarter and soft. The taste is by far the best of the group.

Clif Bloks: The best flavor variety out there – you'll find options like Spearmint, Margarita, and Ginger Ale in addition to your standard fruit flavors. A larger chew and stickier than Honey Stinger Chews.

Sport Beans: The biggest jolt to the taste buds during a long run – that tangy sugar hits you in the best way possible when you're dragging. The packaging is the best of the group, because it is a little resealable bag you can pop back into your pocket.

Things to remember:

This is not the time to be sugar or calorie conscious. Your muscles need fuel in the form of about 100 calories of sugar per hour during a long-distance race. Why sugar? Because it is the easiest form of fuel for your muscles to process. The body expends a lot more energy to burn fat than it does to burn carbs (sugar). And you need to conserve every bit of energy you have to push you through 26.2

What happens if you wait too long to fuel your muscles? You know the answer to that, because we've all been there! Your pace slows, your head gets foggy, and your running buddy becomes a lot more annoying. **DON'T WAIT TOO LONG TO FUEL DURING YOUR RACE!** Stay ahead of it so your muscles are never operating at a deficit.

And lastly, just as you train your legs and mind to get you through the race, **you also have to train your digestive system.** Use these products during your training runs to help your body get used to them, and do NOT try something new on race day, keep it simple, do what works, and scrap what doesn't.

