

THIS JUST IN...

17%

more fat was oxidised in a cycling workout by subjects who'd taken green tea extract than those who took a placebo, according to a study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. The research suggests that green tea helps the body to burn fat as fuel.

EARLY LEAD

A good breakfast doesn't just set you up for the day, it could also stop middle-age spread. This comes from a study of 7,000 over-40s in Norfolk. Despite consuming more calories each day, those who ate the biggest breakfasts had the lowest BMI and gained least weight over the next few years - suggesting time of consumption was significant.

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The potential increase in risk of bowel cancer from eating one sausage or three rashers of bacon per day, according to the World Cancer Research Fund. But you don't have to pass up meat altogether - only poor quality processed meats are a problem, so go for meat or sausages that do not contain added preservatives and hasn't been treated to make it last longer.

SWEET DREAMS

If your idea of healthy eating is a bar of dark chocolate every day, you might want to re-think. A study at the University of Western Australia found that eating chocolate on a daily basis could reduce bone density in women. The researchers believe this could be because it contains substances that prevent calcium from being absorbed properly. However, running and other weight-bearing exercise increases bone density, so the more you run, the more chocolate you can eat.

Ale and hearty

There's nothing like a cool pint after a hot run - and it might even do you good

Beer is proof that God loves us and wants us to be happy," said Benjamin Franklin - and who are we to argue with such an august figure?

The problem most runners have, though, is reconciling sinking a couple of cold ones with the consequential effect on their training.

However, although we all know the dangers of drinking too much, moderate beer drinking may be better for us than we think. Beer, like red wine, does have health benefits. The malt and hops used in both lager and bitter contain flavonoids, which counter cell damage and help reduce the risk of cancer and heart disease.

Beer also contains B-vitamins and chromium, which help in converting carbohydrate to energy; and choline, which, ironically, protects against liver damage and memory loss.

In 2003, a review of studies showed that while heavy alcohol consumption increases the risk of a stroke, moderate consumption may lower it. The recommended daily intake for athletes is 500ml (just under one pint) for men and 250ml (just under a half) for women.

There are also benefits linked to recovery from exercise, says nutritionist Kim Pearson (www.equilibria-health.co.uk). "Beer contains predominantly water and carbohydrate, both of which are essential in post-race recovery," she says. "A recent study at Granada University in Spain found that the sugars, salts and bubbles in a pint can help athletes absorb fluids more quickly than rehydrating with water.

"The carbon dioxide in beer helps quench thirst more quickly, while the carbohydrates replace some

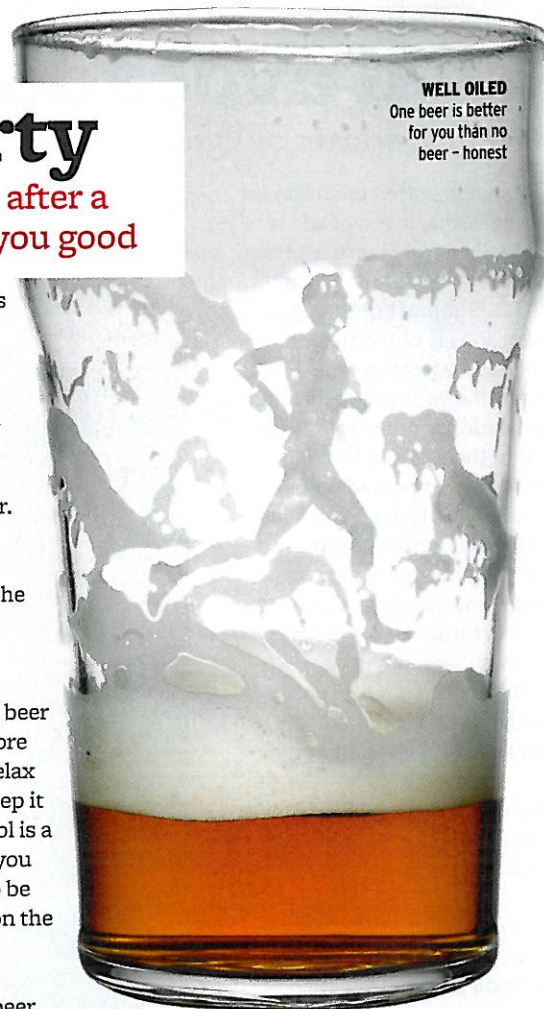
of the calories lost through exercise."

Moderate consumption is the key to enjoying a guilt-free beer. Use these guidelines to keep you on the straight and narrow:

➔ A pre-race beer the night before to help you relax is fine, but keep it to one: alcohol is a diuretic and you don't want to be dehydrated on the start line.

➔ Drinking beer after a run is a great way to unwind, but match it with plenty of water and healthy post-training snacks (pork scratchings don't count).

➔ Drinking lots of beer during a race is a bad idea but a few sips on a fun run won't hurt you. Just take care not to drink too much as even a small amount in this situation can cause dehydration and impair judgement.



➔ Try to drink organic beers, advises Pearson. "They are produced with far fewer chemical additives, which make them the healthiest option," she says. "If your local pub doesn't sell any organic varieties, then opt for a beer that comes from a smaller, lesser-known brewery, as this is more likely to contain more natural ingredients."

CHASERS WITH PINTS

If standard sports drinks during races don't cut it for you, try the Midsummer Dream Footpath Race in Devon. In Britain's answer to the Medoc Marathon, runners down a pint at six pubs along the gorgeous-but-tough route, as well as a cream tea. This year's race on June 21 is already sold out (see www.axevalleyrunners.org.uk) but if you're spitting feathers, these races

also offer a winning combination of lovely scenery and beer:

The Stroud Beer Race 7.2, Gloucestershire, May 7

The Braishfield Beer 5, Hampshire, June 15

The Bugatti Beer 10K, Gloucestershire, August 6