

# Natural sources of energy

Looking for natural ways to keep your body fuelled? If you're not a fan of energy gels, here are some great alternatives suggested by nutritionist **Christine Bailey**

If you enjoy long runs, cycle rides, hikes and endurance events, you know that maintaining sufficient energy to perform at your best is hugely important. Fuelling correctly can make all the difference to your performance and helps offset the effects of fatigue by providing muscles with additional energy. But what if you don't like the taste or texture of energy gels? There are alternatives, but firstly let's look at why we need fuel during endurance training.

## THE NEED FOR FUEL

Typically, we can store about 90 minutes of muscle glycogen when exercising at a reasonable pace. This means that if you are exercising for much longer than 90 minutes and/or exercising at a high intensity, you will benefit from consuming additional fuel. For long endurance events, it is typically recommended that you consume 30-60g of carbohydrate per hour, plus sufficient fluids and electrolytes.

For many, an energy gel provides a convenient option – it's a handy little sachet of carbs specifically designed to be absorbed quickly for an energy boost. Most gels contain around 20-40g carbs and some come with electrolytes and caffeine for an additional performance boost.

## NATURAL ALTERNATIVES

Energy gels are not for everyone – if you have a sensitive stomach you may find that some brands cause digestive upsets. They can also be sickly sweet. If you'd rather eat food instead of gels, aim to eat frequently but with less volume to keep energy levels high (a few bites every 30-40 minutes). Choose low-fibre foods if you want a quick energy boost without stomach upsets.

## FRUIT POUCHES

They may be targeted at toddlers, but these resealable fruit puree pouches are perfect for endurance sports. Essentially, they are puréed fruit in a pouch. There are many flavours, including banana, apple, pear and fruit blends. The 70g pouches are ideal for a quick energy boost. Being just fruit, they are naturally gluten-free and suitable for vegans. One of the drawbacks is the pouches are a little bulky but could be squashed up into a belt or large pocket. Try Ella's Kitchen Strawberry and Apple Pouch Per 70g pack – it contains 54kcal and 12.2g carbohydrate.

## BANANAS

These are a great choice for hiking or cycling where you may have more options for storage. Bananas are



## HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN ENERGY GEL

It is possible to make your own energy gel and spoon it into snack-sized ziplock bags. These can be kept in the fridge until needed. Blend together 6 pitted Medjool dates, 150g honey/coconut syrup, 1 tbsp chia seeds, a pinch of sea salt and 1 tbsp raw cacao powder, then allow it to sit for 30 minutes to thicken. Blend again until smooth. Scoop 1½ tbsp of the gel into snack-sized ziplock bags. Calories per 1½ tbsp: 70kcal and 15.7g carbohydrate.

a high-carb energy-booster and a super source of potassium which is lost through sweat. One medium banana contains around 105kcal and 27g carbohydrate.

## DATES

Dates are a Middle Eastern favourite for an energy boost. With a dose of B vitamins, and manganese for energy, plus potassium, these are typically a more nutritious option than a gel. With a moderate glycaemic index, they provide a steady release of energy. For a more filling snack, try stuffing dates with a little marzipan. One pitted Medjool date contains around 60kcal and 18g carbohydrate.

## MINI RICE CAKES

Often found down the baby aisle, mini rice cakes are simply a mix of pressed rice typically sweetened with apple juice. Low in fibre and gluten-free, these are light and small enough to pack into pockets. Three mini rice cakes contain 23kcal and 5.3g carbs.

## PRETZELS

The combination of high glycaemic carbohydrate and sodium makes pretzels a useful option for long events or training in hot weather. Perfect if you're looking for a more savoury option. A handful (30g) provides 118kcal and 23g carbohydrate.



'DRIED FRUIT IS A CONCENTRATED SOURCE OF ENERGY, MEANING A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY'

## NATURAL GEL OPTIONS

Here are a couple of favourites



### One Pro Nutrition Energy Gels

These new energy gels contain a combination of fruit concentrates and maltodextrin for a less sickly-sweet taste that's gentle on the stomach. They're naturally flavoured and with no additives or preservatives. One gel contains 88kcal and 22g carbohydrate. [onepronutrition.com](http://onepronutrition.com)



### CLIF BLOKS Energy Chews

With easy-to-open packaging, these soft chews are a great alternative to gels with no mess. They contain a combination of cane syrup, tapioca syrup and maltodextrin and they provide a quick-releasing energy source. Three pieces contain 100kcal and 24g carbohydrate. [clifbar.com](http://clifbar.com)

## DRIED FRUIT AND TRAIL MIXES

Dried fruit is a concentrated source of energy, meaning that a little goes a very long way. Some are higher in fibre than others, so choose wisely if you have a sensitive stomach or you could run into problems. Dried pineapple is a good choice as it's low in fibre and is also a source of bromelain (a natural enzyme), making it gentler on the stomach. One small handful (1oz/28g) contains 82kcal and 21g of carbohydrate. For a more substantial snack, you could always make up your own trail mix with a combination of dried fruits, popcorn and nuts. Spoon into little ziplock bags for easy use.

## HEALTH LAB ENERGY BALLS

If you don't want to make your own energy balls, Health Lab produces a range of great-tasting energy balls that are perfect for a quick energy fix. Some have added functional ingredients like probiotics and matcha green tea. They aren't sticky and each ball is individually wrapped. There are various flavours available, including Salted Caramel, Chocolate Brownie and Espresso Hemp. They are gluten-free. One Chocolate Brownie Protein Ball contains 159kcal and 18.1g carbohydrates. For more information, visit [healthlabuk.org](http://healthlabuk.org). So there's no shortage of options to fuel your long runs or training rides. 

