



Beer Benefits

From [Kerry McCarthy Runners World June 08](#)

"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.

Here comes the science bit...

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."

A little of what you fancy

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."