

Running Hungary

by Jose Antonio, Ph.D. and Sonja Friend-Uhl

You can't judge a book by its cover. And at first glance, the physique of Sonja Friend-Uhl is more akin to a Porsche Carrera whereas the typical female distance runner is built more like a Dodge Neon. An outstanding distance runner, Sonja Friend-Uhl (pronounced Fren-d-Yool) has been named to the U.S. team for the IAAF Half-Marathon World Championships in October 8 in Debrecen, Hungary. (Note: by the time you read this, she will have competed). At the age of 35, Sonja has recently set a PR in the 5k. So clearly, in the battle of Sonja versus age, Sonja has kicked its proverbial butt to the curb. What's the secret? How does she maintain a rigorous training schedule, have a family, run a business, and stay focused on competing at the highest level?

She does it by treating her nutrition and supplement regimen with the same importance as her training. Nutrition and training are akin to the two wheels of bicycle. If one or the other is dysfunctional, the bicycle doesn't function optimally. But if both are in tip-top shape, then the sky's the limit.

This article gives you a glimpse into the nutritional strategies of an elite female distance runner. What you'll discover is that Sonja is not the typical 'bagels and bananas' eater (i.e. carbohydrates seem to be the sacrosanct nutrient to distance runners at the expense of protein and fat). Instead, she has embraced (and with good reason) nutritional and supplement strategies that have kept her healthy, fit, fast, and competing at the world-class level at the age of 35.

In brief, she partakes in the following.

1. She eats 'clean' (i.e. unprocessed carbs, healthy fats, and lean protein [except for fish in which case fatty fish is preferred])
2. She eats frequent small meals throughout the day. Her typical day involves 6 meals.
3. She eats fresh fruit and vegetables.
4. She gets plenty of protein (roughly 1 gram per lb of body weight).
5. She has 'cheat meals' or cheat days. This is when she allows herself to indulge in 'junk food' such as Hershey Kisses with almonds, Nutter Butter cookies, Sugar babies and the occasional Cheeseburger from Wendy's!
6. She utilizes the 'Nutrient Timing' strategy that has been shown to be effective in promoting quicker recovery.^{1, 2}
 - a. She consumes a protein-carbohydrate shake immediately post-exercise; this is perhaps one of the most important nutritional strategies she implements.
7. She strategically use supplements (most of which are amino acid based) such as:
 - a. Branched-chain amino acids³
 - b. Beta-Alanine^{4, 5}
 - c. L-carnitine⁶
 - d. Whey protein^{7, 8}
 - e. Casein protein^{7, 8}
 - f. Multi-vitamin^{9, 10}

8. She's a 'Professional Eater.' No, not like Kobayashi who holds the hot dog eating record. This means that she treats her eating and supplement strategy with the same detail and importance as training.

The missing link that befalls many distance runners is either a lack of knowledge or discipline regarding using *performance nutrition* protocols as a training tool. The key word being 'tool.' That's all it is. Whether you're 'for supplements' or 'against supplements' is silly. Would you not use an effective and legal strategy if it could help you run faster? To not try these strategies would be akin to not trying a new shoe, a new training technique, or new advice from your strength and conditioning coach. Performance nutrition for middle distance runners is truly the new frontier in the sport. Explore the opportunities available to you via performance nutrition. A new PR awaits!

	Note: Sonja usually trains at 5:00 or 6:00am
Table 1:	Sonja's Typical Day of Eating
Meal 1	Post-workout shake IMMEDIATELY after training: with skim milk, banana, glutamine powder (~5 g) L-carnitine (~1 g) and beta-alanine powder (~2 g)
Meal 2	30-45 minutes after the Post-workout shake Small glass of Orange Juice 2 Hard-Boiled Eggs & Whole Wheat Toast with Butter. *Note: if it were a race day, Sonja has 1/2 cup of oatmeal 2 hours pre-race with water and takes branched-chain amino acid pills and a caffeine-containing supplement 30 min pre-race
Meal 3	Snacks - she eats two or more of the following: string cheese or cottage cheese - always Apple plum peach
Meal 4 ('lunch')	Turkey or Chicken sandwich on whole wheat piece of fruit, blue corn tortilla chips Other choice would be: Beef teriyaki skewers with rice and house salad

Meal 5	<p>Another choice would be: Grilled chicken salad and baked potato</p> <p>Another protein shake: with skim milk, banana, glutamine powder (~5 g) and beta-alanine powder (~2 g)</p> <p>Or another choice: low sodium turkey meat (a few slices) with a few slices of cheese</p>
Meal 6	<p>Grilled chicken with steamed broccoli rice or potato salad</p> <p>Other choices: Grilled steak, steamed Tilapia, beef casserole, or pork chops with the same side dishes (rice, potato, or salad)</p>

Table 2: Supplement Strategy Summary	
	<p>Whey Protein Shake in the morning post-run (with beta alanine, L-Carnatine and glutamine powder) Multivitamin in the morning with breakfast</p> <p>BCAA and Endurance Plus (dosage split) before and after quality workouts and races.</p> <p>Beta Alanine again with lunch. I usually try to take another tablespoon of L-Carnitine with water during lunch Multivitamin and Beta Alanine with dinner.</p> <p>Beta Alanine before bed. Protein shake (casein protein) before bed.</p>

About the Authors: Jose Antonio, Ph.D. and Sonja Friend-Uhl have a business based in South Florida called RunFast Promotions (www.runfastpromotions.com) ; RunFast is dedicated to educating distance runners about the latest science of training and nutrition via seminars, camps, print articles, and radio (www.runfastpodcast.com).

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