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9 Best Running Gels of 2024

By [Amanda Capritto](#)



Edited by [Marlo Jappen Porto](#)

Updated: Aug. 13, 2024



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For long or particularly intense runs, running gels, which are also called energy gels, can quickly deliver carbohydrates to your body to sustain performance and prevent your blood sugar from dropping too low. They contain simple carbohydrates (and sometimes caffeine and electrolytes) in an easy-to-use squeeze pack, making them ideal for consuming when you're on the move.

As a seasoned runner, triathlete, and National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM) certified sports nutrition coach, I've relied on my own experiences to come up with this list of the top running gels. I also connected with a registered dietitian and certified specialist in sports dietetics for additional insights. While the Maurten Gel 100 is the best overall option, I've covered a range of the best running gels to suit different needs and dietary preferences.

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Best Overall

Maurten Gel 100 »

**PROS:**

- ✓ Mild taste
- ✓ Vegan/vegetarian
- ✓ Free from major allergens
- ✓ No artificial additives
- ✓ Optimized carbohydrate ratio

CONS:

- ✗ Thicker texture may not be for everyone
- ✗ Expensive

[Buy From Maurten](#)

Maurten 100 Gels have helped me get through many hours of Ironman 70.3 training during a scorchingly hot summer in South Florida. After trying dozens of running gels, I gravitate toward these for a few reasons, a big one being that the flavor is mild and neutral so it didn't make me feel nauseous like stronger flavors can during long midsummer runs.

These gels have 100 calories a pop (25 grams of carbohydrates) and a fructose-to-glucose ratio of 0.8 to 1 (0.8 grams of fructose per 1 gram of glucose). This ratio is considered by some to be the most optimal for

maximal carbohydrate digestion, absorption, and delivery, according to [recent research](#). As for caffeine, there’s none in the base Maurten Gel 100, but Maurten makes a [Gel 100 Caf 100](#) with 100 milligrams of caffeine.

Notably, Maurten Gel 100 gels have a much thicker texture than other gel options. It’s more like an actual gel than a thick liquid. This is because Maurten utilizes a hydrogel technology to optimize digestion. This comes with a perk: You don’t have to drink water with a Maurten Gel 100 like you do with most other gels. The texture may initially be off-putting if you’re used to honeylike gels, but I say give it a try. You may find that it sits better with your stomach than traditional energy gels.

Specs

List Price:	\$43.20 (12 gels)
Flavors:	Unflavored
Carbs Per Serving:	25 g
Caffeine:	0 mg

[Buy From Maurten »](#)

Best Budget

Nature Nate’s Honey Minis »

**PROS:**

- ✓ Costs less than \$0.75 per serving
- ✓ Only one ingredient
- ✓ No additives
- ✓ Raw and unfiltered honey

CONS:

- ✗ Sticky
- ✗ Relatively low in carbohydrates

[Buy From Amazon](#)

Running gels are certainly not cheap. In fact, most go for more than \$1.50 per serving, with some options costing a shocking \$3 or more per serving. If you're looking for a far less expensive way to stay fueled during runs, a simple packet of honey can do the trick. Though honey doesn't boast an optimized glucose-to-fructose ratio or contain specialized ingredients like some running gels, it still delivers quick-digesting carbohydrates to your working muscles and that's really all you need.

Nature Nate's Honey Minis are an excellent option for runners who want all-natural carbohydrates as fuel for a lower cost. Ringing up at less than \$7.50

for a 20-count package on Amazon, these gels cost less than 75 cents per serving. With 12 grams of carbohydrates per pouch, you may need to carry more packets to fulfill your nutritional needs during long runs. However, even if you’re eating two packets per hour, it still turns out to be less expensive than taking one gel per hour at an average of \$2 per gel.

Specs

List Price:	\$7.27 (20 servings)
Flavors:	Unflavored (honey)
Carbs Per Serving:	12 g
Caffeine:	0 mg

[Buy From Amazon »](#)

Best for Marathons

Science In Sport Go Isotonic Energy Gels »

**PROS:**

- ✓ More than 20 grams of carbs per serving
- ✓ Isotonic formula reduces stomach stress
- ✓ Mild taste
- ✓ Smooth, slightly liquid texture

CONS:

- ✗ Negligible sodium content
- ✗ Packets are larger and may be hard to fit in belts/vests

[Buy From Amazon](#)

There isn't truly a specific gel that's best for long-distance races over other options since everyone has unique nutritional needs and preferences. However, I will say that I've found Science In Sport Go Isotonic Energy Gels to sit well with my stomach during the late stages of long training sessions, which I can't say for every gel I've used. It could be due to the isotonic formula, which means it contains a precise ratio of water, salt, and carbohydrates to improve digestion.

Because of the isotonic formula, you don't have to drink extra water with Science In Sport gels, which can also help reduce bloating and the "slushy"

feeling that often comes with excess water consumption. The digestion-friendly formula also means these gels are more liquid, making them easier to swallow than thicker gels. That’s a welcome change for runners who start to feel repulsed by gels or food at the end of a long race or training session. On the topic of caffeine, these gels don’t contain any, but Science In Sport does make [Go Isotonic Energy + Caffeine Gels](#) with 75 or 150 milligrams of caffeine.

Specs

List Price:	Starting at \$50 (30 gels)
Flavors:	Orange, Apple, Pineapple, Lemon Lime, Tropical, Tutti Frutti, and Cherry
Carbs Per Serving:	22 g
Caffeine:	0 mg

[Buy From Amazon »](#)

Best Vegan

Huma Chia Energy Gels »

**PROS:**

- ✓ Suitable for people on vegan diet
- ✓ Whole-food formula
- ✓ Gluten-free
- ✓ Several flavors
- ✓ About 100 milligrams of sodium per serving

CONS:

- ✗ Larger packets may be hard to fit in belt/vest
- ✗ Grainy texture from chia seeds

[Buy From Amazon](#)

Runners who prefer whole-food sources of fuel will appreciate Huma Chia Energy Gels. Made with real blended fruit and chia seeds, Huma's running gels are vegan, gluten-free, and non-GMO without sacrificing taste. They contain 21 to 25 grams of carbohydrates per serving depending on the flavor, which is on par with the expected average across running gels. They don't have an optimized glucose-to-fructose ratio – they're made from fruit, after all – so they're best for runners who don't put too much value on the scientifically optimal solution for endurance nutrition.

I particularly like Huma Chia Energy Gels for high-intensity, interval-focused training sessions that include rest periods. Instead of trying to slurp down what’s essentially a thick smoothie, I can take my time to refuel in between sets. That said, they’ll work for any type of run.

Specs

List Price:	\$2.50 (per gel)
Flavors:	Strawberries, Apples & Cinnamon, Blueberries, Cafe Mocha, Chocolate, Lemonade, Mangoes, and Raspberries
Carbs Per Serving:	21 g (Blueberries, Mangoes, Raspberries) 22 g (Apples & Cinnamon, Lemonade), 23 g (Strawberries), or 25 g (Cafe Mocha, Chocolate)
Caffeine:	0 mg (Strawberries, Apples & Cinnamon, Blueberries, Mangoes), 25 mg (Chocolate, Lemonade, Raspberries) or 50 mg (Cafe Mocha)

[Buy From Amazon »](#)

Best for Easy Digestion

GU Liquid Energy Packets »

**PROS:**

- ✓ Liquid so it digests quicker than solid gels
- ✓ Not messy
- ✓ More than 20 grams of carbs per serving
- ✓ Almost 200 milligrams of sodium per serving

CONS:

- ✗ Can seem overly sweet at times
- ✗ Packets are larger, making it harder to fit in belts/vests

[Buy From Amazon](#)

If you struggle to keep gels down when the going gets tough, consider GU Liquid Energy Packets. Since they're liquid, you don't need to [drink water](#) with them for optimal digestion (but still stay on top of your hydration plan). They contain more than 20 grams of carbs per serving and nearly 200 milligrams of sodium, so they're an excellent option for those who don't carry electrolyte beverages.

The packets are larger, meaning they're sometimes difficult to fit into [running belts](#) or [vests](#), but I found them to be worth carrying during particularly taxing training sessions or races. The best part, though, is that these liquid gels go

down the hatch quickly and don't leave a sticky mess. One of my favorite things to do during triathlon training is to freeze GU Liquid Energy Packets the night before a session: On hot days, they'll partially defrost and you'll have a slushy to enjoy.

Specs

List Price:	\$25.20 (12 gels)
Flavors:	Coffee, Lemonade, Cola, Strawberry Banana, and Orange
Carbs Per Serving:	23 g
Caffeine:	0 mg (Lemonade, Strawberry Banana), 20 mg (Orange), or 40 mg (Coffee, Cola)

[Buy From Amazon »](#)

Best for Flavor Variety

GU Original Running Gels »

**PROS:**

- ✓ More than a dozen flavors
- ✓ Small packets are easy to carry
- ✓ Available with or without caffeine
- ✓ Banned substance tested
- ✓ Contains electrolytes and branched-chain amino acids (BCAAs)

CONS:

- ✗ Texture is somewhat sticky
- ✗ Some flavors have chemical aftertaste

[Buy From Amazon](#)

GU is a major player in the endurance nutrition game and for a good reason: The brand makes good products and produces a variety of flavors to suit different tastes. The GU Original Running Gels are available in more than a dozen flavor options, including Strawberry Banana, Raspberry Lemonade,

Birthday Cake, Espresso Love, and Salted Caramel. Whether you like bright fruity flavors or something richer and decadent, GU has you covered.

Each GU Original Running Gel contains more than 20 grams of carbohydrates in the form of maltodextrin (a processed starch) and fructose. The gels have varying amounts of caffeine, sodium, and BCAAs depending on the flavor.

While GU has treated me well during training for various events and in many different settings – I’ve used them during triathlon brick sessions, long runs and rides, and full-day hikes – I’ve found that a few of the flavors can produce a chemical aftertaste. It’s not terrible, but I do recommend trying a variety of flavors before committing to a bulk box of any single flavor.

Specs

List Price:	\$38.40 (24 gels)
Flavors:	Chocolate Outrage, Tri-Berry, Vanilla Bean, Strawberry Banana, Cola Me Happy, Salted Caramel, Birthday Cake, Campfire S’mores, Jet Blackberry, Lemon Sublime, Salted Watermelon, Tastefully Nude, Mandarin Orange, Espresso Love, Caramel Macchiato, and Raspberry Lemonade
Carbs Per Serving:	22 g (Chocolate Outrage, Vanilla Bean, Campfire S’Mores, Caramel Macchiato, Salted Caramel, Salted Watermelon, Cola Me Happy, Birthday Cake, Jet Blackberry) or 23 g (Tri-Berry, Espresso Love, Strawberry Banana, Mandarin Orange, Lemon Sublime, Raspberry Lemonade, Tastefully Nude)
Caffeine:	0 mg (Birthday Cake, Strawberry Banana, Campfire S’Mores, Raspberry Lemonade), 20 mg (Chocolate Outrage, Salted Watermelon, Tri-Berry, Vanilla Bean, Salted Caramel, Tastefully Nude, Mandarin Orange), 23 mg (Lemon Sublime), or 40 mg (Cola Me Happy, Jet Blackberry, Espresso Love, Caramel Macchiato)

[Buy From Amazon »](#)

Best With Caffeine

Precision Nutrition PF30 Caffeine Gels »



PROS:

- ✓ 100 milligrams of caffeine per gel
- ✓ 30 grams of carbs per gel
- ✓ Texture is easy to get down
- ✓ Optimized carbohydrate ratio

CONS:

- ✗ Pricey
- ✗ Flavor is almost too sweet

[Buy From Amazon](#)

Most running gels have negligible amounts of caffeine in them if any at all. For someone who's a regular coffee drinker or consumer of energy drinks, 20 or 40 milligrams of caffeine won't make a noticeable difference. That's why I recommend Precision Nutrition PF30 Caffeine Gels for runners who want a

more significant energy boost. These contain 100 milligrams of caffeine per gel, which is about the same as a strong cup of brewed coffee.

These gels also contain 30 grams of carbohydrates per serving, which is on the high side, and those carbs come in a very effective 2-to-1 ratio of glucose to fructose. You can consume up to three PF30 Caffeine Gels in an hour, as [studies show](#) that the body can digest and absorb up to 90 grams of carbohydrates per hour when consumed in this ratio. Three gels would equate to 300 milligrams of caffeine, though, so it would be wise to mix in other gel sources. (Precision Nutrition has a [caffeine-free PF30 gel](#), too.)

PF30 Caffeine Gels are unflavored; they taste akin to sugar water, which is essentially what they are (sugars in liquid). Some people may find them too sweet, but the texture is smooth, easy to swallow, and not as sticky as some other gels.

Specs

List Price:	\$89.99 (30 gels)
Flavors:	Unflavored
Carbs Per Serving:	30 g
Caffeine:	100 mg

[Buy From Amazon »](#)

Best Gluten-Free

UnTapped Athletic Fuel Energy Gels »

**PROS:**

- ✓ Gluten-free and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) certified organic
- ✓ All-natural carb source
- ✓ 26 grams of carbs per serving
- ✓ Small narrow packets

CONS:

- ✗ Not appealing if you don't like maple syrup
- ✗ Sticky

[Buy From Amazon](#)

If you're a fan of maple syrup, you'll enjoy UnTapped Athletic Fuel Energy Gels. They're available in five flavors, all of which are gluten-free and USDA-certified organic. Made with the simplest of ingredients, UnTapped running gels, which contain 26 grams of carbohydrates per serving, include whole-food-sourced items like pure maple syrup, cocoa, raspberry juice, and coffee (depending on the flavor).

Since these gels are made from syrup, expect a bit of a sticky situation if any of the gel happens to spill. The pouches are easy to tear open, though, so it's

not a problem you’re likely to encounter. Additionally, I found these gels to be the easiest to store in a running vest or running belt. They’re much narrower than most gel packets so they don’t take up much room in your pack.

Specs

List Price:

\$36.95 (20 packets)

Flavors:

Maple, Coffee, Salted Raspberry, Salted Cocoa, and Salted Citrus

Carbs Per Serving:

26 g

Caffeine:

0 mg (Maple, Salted Raspberry, Salted Cocoa, Salted Citrus) or 27 mg (Coffee)

[Buy From Amazon »](#)

Best Organic

Honey Stinger Original Energy Gel »

**PROS:**

- ✓ USDA-certified organic
- ✓ Gluten-free, dairy-free, and non-GMO
- ✓ 24 grams of carbs per serving
- ✓ 50 milligrams of sodium per serving
- ✓ Natural source of carbs (honey)

CONS:

- ✗ No caffeine
- ✗ Slight aftertaste

[Buy From Amazon](#)

All Honey Stinger Original Energy Gels are USDA-certified organic. They're also gluten-free, dairy-free, and non-GMO. Consisting largely of honey, these running gels also include organic tapioca syrup for another carb source, plus a few other ingredients for taste and texture.

I've used Honey Stinger gels quite frequently during training, and I find the flavors and texture to be palatable. Though, I tend to detect a slight

aftertaste, especially in the Fruit Smoothie flavor. It’s not a deal breaker but something to know if you often pick up on aftertastes.

Each packet provides you with 24 grams of carbs, 50 milligrams of sodium, and 50 milligrams of potassium, so this blend also contributes slightly to electrolyte intake. These organic gels are available in four flavors, one of which – Strawberry Kiwi – contains 32 milligrams of caffeine.

Specs

List Price:	\$40 (24 gels)
Flavors:	Fruit Smoothie, Gold (honey), Strawberry Kiwi, and Acai Pomegranate
Carbs Per Serving:	24 g
Caffeine:	0 mg (Fruit Smoothie, Gold, Acai Pomegranate) or 32 mg (Strawberry Kiwi)

[Buy From Amazon »](#)

The Bottom Line

Maurten Gel 100 is my top pick for the best running gel because it features an incredibly simple formula with an optimized carbohydrate ratio that’s in line with what’s recommended in peer-reviewed scientific literature. It also has a mildly sweet and neutral taste, so it can work for many runners.

Things To Consider When Buying Running Gels

Ingredients and Digestibility: Endurance athletes should read the label and ingredients list for the types and amount of carbohydrates in a running gel, says Jena Brown, a registered dietitian and a certified specialist in sport dietetics (RD, CSSD) at Victorem Nutrition. The type of running gel you choose may be influenced by individual dietary restrictions and preferences such as vegan, gluten-free, or whole-food.

“Always practice with the products you plan to use before your race,” she says. “Read the label and make sure it fits into your total race nutrition plan. Individual gastrointestinal tolerability of running gel ingredients varies. This is why products should be tested during training and meet your individual nutrition needs.” If you’re unsure of your needs, it’s best to meet with a sports dietitian.

Carbs Per Serving: Most running gels provide 80 to 120 calories per gel because they typically contain 20 to 30 grams of carbohydrate, says Brown. “However, there are higher-carbohydrate gels on the market that contain 40 to 90 grams of carbohydrate. It is important to always read the label, and make sure that the product you choose meets your individual race nutrition needs,” she says.

Electrolytes: Additional sodium from a running gel may or may not be necessary depending on the amount you’re getting from your total race nutrition plan and individual electrolyte needs, Brown says. Gels shouldn’t be your only source of sodium during training or racing, especially in hot weather and for activities lasting more than one hour. Some athletes prefer to use gels with 0 milligrams of sodium so they can finely tune their electrolyte calculations from other sources for their training session or race.

Sugar Source: Running gels contain a variety of carb sources, including glucose, sucrose, dextrose, maltodextrin, fructose, or starches. Brown says it’s best to choose a running gel that contains a mix of carbohydrate sources to help avoid gastrointestinal distress and [optimize performance](#). Gels that use whole-food sources, such as fruit, honey, and maple syrup, are also options.

Caffeine Content: There are some exceptions, of course, but a running gel typically has just 20 to 50 milligrams of caffeine, which is less than a cup of drip coffee. If you’re a regular consumer of caffeine, such doses are unlikely to affect your energy levels or will have a negligible impact at best. If you really need caffeine, look for a

gel with 80 to 100 milligrams or try caffeine capsules as part of your overall fueling plan for longer events.

Flavor Options and Taste: Taste is preferential, though there are some gels out there that the running community can probably agree are objectively bad. That said, it's a good idea to buy small packages at first to make sure you like the gels. Having a variety pack on hand is also ideal if you tend to get bored by the same flavor after a while.

Portability and Packaging: If you wear a running vest or running belt, you'll want to make sure that your gels fit easily into your pack. Gels are more or less the same size, but certain types contain more water so those packages are naturally heavier and larger. Whole-food gels often come in larger packages, too.

How To Use Running Gels

Running gels are best used as intraworkout fuel. They're also great pre-workout nutrition for individuals who find it difficult to eat whole foods before a run or other training session.

How often you take running gels depends entirely on the demands of your training session, your unique nutritional needs, and your race strategy. In general, it's a good idea to consume 20 to 90 grams of carbohydrates per hour of exercise, but where exactly your needs fall in that range depends on factors such as your body size and body composition – both influence muscle glycogen storage – exercise intensity, terrain considerations (influencing effort), and weather conditions.

Plan to take energy gels at regular intervals in order to keep circulating glucose at optimal levels, as this helps your body refrain from tapping too deeply into its limited glycogen stores. Again, the exact number of gels you should take and at what interval is 100% individual, but an example could be something like one gel every 45 minutes during a half marathon. It takes five to 20 minutes for a gel to kick in, depending on the exact contents of the gel.

It's a good idea to drink water with gels. Drinking water helps speed up digestion and absorption, which means those muscle-fueling sugars get into your bloodstream

faster. Isotonic gels are technically formulated so that digestion is optimized without the need for extra water.

How We Chose the Best Running Gels

I chose the best running gels based on my own experience with various gels as a runner and triathlete, as well as my experience as a certified sports nutrition coach. I also consulted with registered dietitian and certified specialist in sport dietetics Jena Brown at [Victorem Nutrition](#). Brown is an endurance nutrition coach who helps long-distance runners and triathletes optimize their performance through smart sports nutrition.

WHY SHOULD YOU TRUST US?

The author, [Amanda Capritto](#), who also contributed original photography to this piece, is a professional gear reviewer specializing in fitness, endurance nutrition, and outdoor recreation. She has nearly seven years of experience testing products and helping consumers make the right buying choices for their needs. Additionally, Amanda is a certified personal trainer and a certified sports nutrition coach, as well as a runner and triathlete. Editor at 360 Reviews [Marlo Jappen Porto](#), who edited this article, has covered a range of fitness and wellness products including [running leggings](#) and [treadmills](#).

FAQ

What are the benefits of running gels?

+

Are running gels only recommended for longer distances?

+

Where do I store running gels?

+

What's the shelf life of running gels?



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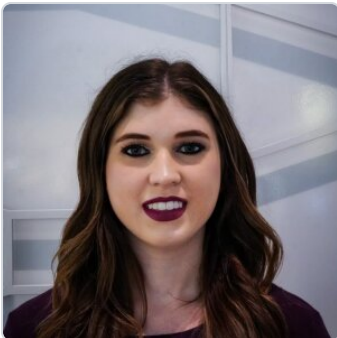
Amanda Capritto

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Amanda Capritto is a content writer and journalist with extensive experience covering health, fitness, outdoors, and nutrition. She is a certified personal trainer, a sports nutrition coach, and the founder of Smarter Sweat, a fitness coaching business where she focuses on helping individuals reach their full potential in the outdoors.

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