

# ULTRA RUNNING AND REDS

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



# REDS 101



## What is REDs?

REDs, or Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport, is a clinical health condition that occurs when an athlete doesn't have enough energy available to support training, recovery and normal bodily functions. REDs can affect any athlete, at any time, and can impact almost every aspect of health and performance.

Up to

**67%**

endurance athletes are at medium or high risk of REDs

## Why it matters

Without enough nutrition and rest, the body begins prioritising basic survival functions over performance and health. This makes it harder to recover, adapt and keep doing the sport you love. When left untreated, REDs can have long-lasting consequences for bone health, hormones and fertility, as well as immunity, mood, metabolism and performance.



## Who's at risk?

Anyone can develop REDs, but **ultra runners are considered to be at higher risk** due to large training loads, long races, body size pressures and a "tough it out" culture. Young athletes can be especially vulnerable, as they are still growing and developing.



EXPLORE MORE:

[www.red-s.com](http://www.red-s.com)

[www.red-s.com/toolkit/faq](http://www.red-s.com/toolkit/faq)

# REDS SYMPTOMS

REDS often develops slowly and subtly, so recognising the signs early is key for protecting long-term health and performance.



Frequent or persistent illness or fatigue



Loss of periods or irregular periods



Increased injuries (soft tissue and bone)



Reduced morning erections, low libido



Reduced speed, strength and/or endurance



GI disruption and/or impaired metabolism



Poor recovery between sessions



Preoccupation with food or body



Declining or plateauing performance



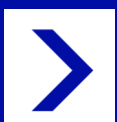
Low moods, anxiety or depression

## PITFALLS TO AVOID

Avoid underestimating your energy needs or assuming “normal eating” is enough. Try not to copy others, or modify your diet without expert guidance.

Avoid thinking more is always better and try not to push through illness, injury or fatigue.

Remember that fueling needs increase in line with training. Seek support early, rather than waiting for performance to drop or your body to force you to stop.



EXPLORE MORE:

[www.red-s.com/about](http://www.red-s.com/about)  
[www.red-s.com/articles/talking-to-your-doctor](http://www.red-s.com/articles/talking-to-your-doctor)

PROJECT REDS



# ANY SEX OR SIZE

REDs is about energy balance, not appearance. Anybody in *any* body can be impacted.

## WHAT'S NORMAL

- Regular morning erections (males) and natural monthly menstrual cycles (females)\*
- Feeling strong and recovered from training
- Stable bodyweight, even with intense training

## WHAT'S NOT

- 3+ months of irregular or absent periods
- Reduced libido
- Persistent fatigue, hair loss, mood changes
- Frequent illness or injury
- Unexplained weight changes



## MYTH VS FACT

✗ "People who eat a lot don't get REDs"

✓ Even athletes who eat a lot can still be in a prolonged energy deficit if their energy needs aren't being met

✗ "I get my periods, I'm on the pill"

✓ The withdrawal bleed from the contraceptive pill is not a natural period and it can mask menstrual dysfunction. Missing or irregular periods can increase the risk of stress fractures and long-term bone health issues.

✗ "I'm not lean enough to have REDs"

✓ An athlete can be under-fuelled internally regardless of their weight, shape or appearance.



EXPLORE MORE:

<https://red-s.com/toolkit/not-just-a-female-thing>  
[www.red-s.com/toolkit/period-power](http://www.red-s.com/toolkit/period-power)

PROJECT REDS 

# FUEL LIKE A CHAMP



## BALANCE IS KEY

Ultra training creates a huge energy demand.

Aim for meals that include carbohydrates for energy, protein for recovery, and fats to support hormones, health, and endurance.

“Eat enough, always.  
Eat too much, sometimes.  
Eat too little, never.”

- David Roche,  
Ultrarunner and  
Coach

## TIME IT RIGHT

Always eat something before and after training. Regular meals, snacks, in-session fuel, and post-session recovery all help support training, adaptation, and everyday life, even on rest days.

Eating well on easier days gives your body a chance to repair, adapt, and restore energy balance before the next day's training.

## YOU DO YOU

Fueling needs vary between people, training phases, and lifestyles.

Aim for consistency, not perfection, and remember that enjoying food is part of a healthy relationship with fueling.

The work only works when your body has enough support to respond.



### EXPLORE MORE:

[www.red-s.com/toolkit/fuel-like-a-champ](http://www.red-s.com/toolkit/fuel-like-a-champ)  
[www.red-s.com/articles-search 'nutrition'](http://www.red-s.com/articles-search-nutrition)





# ATHLETE ADVICE

**NOTHING BEATS  
SUSTAINABLE  
PERFORMANCE**

## KNOW YOUR NORMAL

Don't ignore early signs like fatigue, mood changes, dips in performance or hormonal changes.

If your body is trying to tell you something, it's better to listen sooner rather than later. Talk to a friend, coach, parent, or someone you trust if you're not sure.

## RECOVERY IS TRAINING TOO

Fitness happens when you recover, not just when you train. Include easy days, rest days, steady weeks, and flexibility when your body needs it.

Sleep matters too. Aim for 8+ hours a night to allow your body to repair and rebuild.

## MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

Shift your focus from aesthetics or short-term results to the bigger picture, i.e. your energy, recovery, and how you feel day-to-day.

Your body's signals are just as important as your training data.



### EXPLORE MORE:

[www.red-s.com/toolkit/train-smarter-not-harder](http://www.red-s.com/toolkit/train-smarter-not-harder)  
[www.red-s.com/articles](http://www.red-s.com/articles)





# WHAT TO DO NEXT?

REDs often develops slowly and subtly, so recognising the signs early is essential for protecting long-term health and performance. If you're at all concerned, don't just push through. REDs is something to take seriously, and support is available.

**NOTHING BEATS  
SUSTAINABLE  
PERFORMANCE**

## TALK TO SOMEONE

Start by telling someone you trust. You don't need to have all the answers before you speak up, and you don't need to figure it out alone.

Doubt can creep in, especially when symptoms feel subtle or you're used to them. So keep taking the next step: book the appointment, follow it up, and keep choosing your long-term health.

## WHO CAN HELP?

**GP/SPORTS DOCTOR:**  
For tests, referrals and diagnosis

**SPORTS DIETITIAN:**  
For personalised fueling support

**SPORT PSYCHOLOGIST:**  
For mental health concerns

**PROJECT REDS:**  
For advice and recommendations



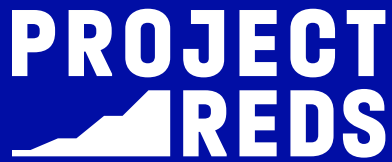
### EXPLORE MORE:

[www.red-s.com/get-support](http://www.red-s.com/get-support)  
[www.red-s.com/articles/talking-to-your-doctor](http://www.red-s.com/articles/talking-to-your-doctor)





MORE INFO AT NUTRITION HUB  
[WWW.ULTRA-X.CO](http://WWW.ULTRA-X.CO)



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