

*'As always, Renee hits this sweet balance between health and performance nutrition, placing humans at the forefront.'*

– GERMAIN GRANGIER, trail and mountain runner

# Fuel for Thought

A PRACTICAL GUIDE  
TO FUELLING FOR  
YOUR ADVENTURES



**RENEE McGREGOR**

FOREWORD BY JENNY TOUGH

Also by Renee McGregor  
*Training Food*  
*Fast Fuel Food for Running Success*  
*Fast Fuel Food for Triathlon Success*  
*Orthorexia*  
*More Fuel You*

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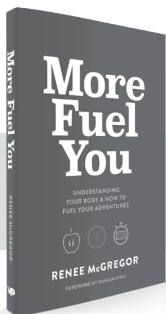
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## FOREWORD

I've been running for twenty years now, starting as a teenager angry at my body, evolving into a marathoner pursuing time goals, and growing into an adventure-chasing trail and ultrarunner. I've naturally been through highs and lows with my sport, my body and the eternal pursuit of trying to be 'better'. Running has taken me around the world and given me a community and friendship circle that is incredibly dear to me. Running saves me from myself and connects me with the beautiful natural world I get to run through. But it can also leave me frustrated – when my body doesn't look like the ultrarunners I see in magazines, when my performance plateaus or even recedes. By the time I met Renee McGregor, I'm sure I had already tried nearly every type of 'diet' that made the rounds in the running world, always hoping that this would be the promised magic recipe to morph my body into the (impossible) standards imposed on female athletes.

When a doctor informed me that I had an eating disorder, I was in disbelief. I had been 'eating healthily' my entire adult life. Carefully avoiding Bad Foods, loading up on Good Foods. I followed sound nutritional advice from trusted authors and athletes who backed up their claims with (supposed) science and results. I hadn't had normal menstrual function in over a decade, but I had been reassured by doctors that this was totally normal for my level of exercise. Besides, I had just won a major ultra race and was maintaining a high level of exercise – only, I had admittedly been slowing down a lot and suffering with debilitating fatigue and difficulty recovering. I had only called the doctor hoping she would offer some bloodwork and tell me I needed an extra macronutrient supplement, or something like that. I didn't expect her to say that I simply wasn't eating enough – and had some profound anxiety around food.

My weight has troubled me since I can remember. It made no sense to me that I might not be eating enough – if I wasn't getting enough, then why wasn't I losing weight? I was losing my hair, so why not my belly?

Recovering from REDs was harder than any ultra I've trained for. It required an entire rewiring of my brain around food. I had to significantly increase my intake and start to let food types back into my diet – or at least learn not to have a panic attack around them. I had to become aware of just how much of my daily thoughts revolved around food and my body composition, and try to turn down the dial on those thoughts.

The entire time, I felt like an outlier, and I still do. A quick scroll through endurance sports-themed social media feeds, magazines, book titles or podcasts, and it seems like nearly everyone is still tossing out the same messages that got me so ill in the first place.

'This one simple trick will help you lose weight'

'How you're sabotaging your fat loss with this ingredient'

'Eat this, not that'

'The secret to losing weight fast'

'Get to racing weight in eight days'

'New way to lose weight, proven by science'

On and on, these tricks and hacks to 'optimising' your body are bombarding athletes, amateur and pro alike. Trendy headlines and beautiful influencers lure us to the magical solution they claim to have found – but wait a few years and a new trend will come along. The goalposts keep moving and we keep buying into a system (the diet industry) designed to fail. They come from all sources on all platforms.

Except for my lovely friend Renee. In the years since her first book, she has stayed consistent in her messaging – I've never seen her adopt a trend, a quick-fix, a *diet*, or debase her years of clinical knowledge in any way to sell more copies or get more followers. She knows what works, what is true, and she is unwavering in spreading that knowledge.

And that's how the penny dropped for me in 'nutritional advice' content. *Everyone* is trying to sell something. Before deciding who to listen to, figure out first what they want to sell. Popular dieting programmes want you to fail so you come back and spend more money. Fad diet authors get huge fame in a short amount of time and sell lots of copies. Magazines and online resources need exciting headlines to grab your attention. They do not need your long-term success. They are simply running a business in a multi-billion-dollar industry.

Combine the capitalist machine pushing these influencers and authors to sell products fast with the often-unrealistic image of athletes' bodies, and you find yourself in a storm of noise with few voices you can trust.

But Renee doesn't want quick fame – she simply wants fewer athletes having GP appointments like the one I had. In my years of recovery, I find myself consistently going back to her books – that I've already read dozens of times – to remind myself what is *true*. When it feels like most runners I know are engaging in harmful practices, largely spurred on by damaging messaging around what a runner's body 'should look like', or confused narratives around 'wellness', I can find myself starting to get confused again. So I go back to Renee. Her expert advice (and I mean truly *expert* – like university-educated, clinical practitioner kind of expert), sensible approach to food for real humans with real lives, and gentle guidance for athletes to find true health and improved performance is my calm in the storm.

In this book, she gently guides us through the truth of how our bodies work when we do sport (and recover!), and how we can meet its needs and feel our very best. Renee opens up about her own relationship with self-image, being a busy working mum, and striving for her own running and adventure goals – and how she manages to balance it all in the real world. She offers gentle guidance, not strict *rules* that you must adhere to. After reading this book, you will feel empowered with a better understanding of what your unique body needs in your unique life to train for your own athletic goals. And, hopefully, you will come away with a better relationship with food.

She even makes a case for ice cream, and I think we can all agree that's very important.

It's hard being a female athlete, especially not having a conforming body type. I still get worried and can be led off the path from time to time, but Renee will always turn to me and say, 'Your body is the least interesting thing about you.'

**Jenny Tough**



## INTRODUCTION

‘Foodie adventures are the best adventures’, so the quote goes, yet why does it feel like we live in a world where we deny ourselves the pure pleasure of eating?

If you have picked up this book, chances are you have been caught up in all the noise and are looking for a trustworthy voice on not only how to fuel your running adventures but also how to rebuild your trust and relationship with both running and food.

If we strip things back to basics, food should be really simple. It is purely a means by which we nourish our bodies, providing it with the nutrients and fuel we need in order to live, perform and interact with others. And yet, in over two decades of working in this speciality known as nutrition, never before have I seen eating and food become so complicated, confusing and polarised.

Everyone has an opinion, and of course they are entitled to that opinion. But as someone who gets to work with people day in, day out on their nutritional needs, what I hear time and time again is ‘I need to get it right!’ and this seems to be more important and valuable than the actual joy of eating.

The cost of living is having an impact on all of us with regard to what we can afford to spend on our weekly shop. This is a real issue and a topic I will be addressing later in this book, but from the conversations I am having in the clinic, it goes deeper than just financial constraints. It appears that food is no longer a personal preference. In fact, I would go as far as saying that there is almost shame in choosing food that we want and enjoy. Instead, food choice has become a behaviour influenced by the external world, which then derails us from listening to our internal cues. And it’s not just restricted to food. The advent of social media means that we now have access to information 24/7, but no real way of filtering whether this information is appropriate, credible or, more importantly, relevant to us.

If someone says ‘running is my job’, be wary. Anyone can run, or at least give it a go. Then there are those of us who gain huge enjoyment from it, are prepared to put the hard work in and actually get pretty decent results. I put myself in this camp, but I definitely don’t see running as my job and I also know that I am not among the few per cent of individuals who are genetically gifted and have physiological talent that elevates them to professional level.

Professional athletes – and I’m not just talking about the Olympic and Paralympic pathway; I’m talking about athletes who get paid to run because of their ability – can absolutely own ‘running is my job’. I have the privilege of working with many of these individuals, and they are very different from the many individuals who from here I am going to call ‘run-fluencers’, who have flooded on to social media platforms and gained traction because they are really, really good at creating content and selling. They get media places at races, not places based on their running ability.

You may feel that I am being very harsh. While that is not my intention, I really think it is important to be aware of the difference because these run-fluencers often lack responsibility and appear to have no awareness of training age, periodisation or, more importantly, rest and what it actually means to be a true athlete. While I don’t believe it is through malice, there is still a real concern about their inability to be mindful that their content can influence unrealistic ideals about training, nutrition and even body composition. Remember, these individuals get paid for their content and they are bloody brilliant at their job, which is why so many of us get sucked in. I hate to say it, but if you follow their lead, it will end in tears. Believe me, I see it unfold daily.

I guess what I’m trying to say is that it’s not really your fault! There are so many unregulated individuals and also professional individuals stepping out of their lane, all trying to sell you a lie. We are only human and we want life to be easy, so if we read a post or watch a video that offers us this potential, why wouldn’t we absorb it and take it on board?

But it goes further than that. While we have had all these technical advances, our brain and central nervous system hasn’t evolved quite as quickly. So while the majority of us in the Western world no longer face the same threats as our ancestors relating to food scarcity, the lack of safe and appropriate shelter, disease or the fear of being eaten, our nervous systems are still on high alert and constantly responding to threats, albeit more socially driven.

Tara Brach, a psychologist I highly respect, summed it up beautifully when she said that we are living in an era where the inherent message in Western society is ‘Do more! Accomplish more! Generate more!’ and of course this leads to a constant fear of falling short, not being enough or doing enough, which impacts our behaviours when it comes to both food and running.

As much as I hate this to be true, it really feels like many of us have lost trust in our bodies and, moreover, we have lost trust in understanding and responding to them.

And this is why I am writing this book!

While I don’t have the authority to write on all subject matters, I do have a wealth of experience, education and knowledge in the area of sports nutrition, running, hormones and generally how to be happier and healthier in our bodies.

I’m fed up with all the noise and, quite frankly, the bullshit advice that is constantly being spouted out of the internet. I want to put the love and fun back into both eating and moving, but more notably running. That doesn’t mean novel ingredients or promoting specialist products that most of us would need to take out a second mortgage to sustain. This book is an opportunity to speak common sense, and to use everyday ingredients to produce simple meals and snacks that even my teenage daughters have approved and will vouch are simple to make on a student budget.

My aim is to create a resource that you can go back to again and again, regardless of your running experience, from absolute beginners to hardened veterans to elite and professional athletes, over all distances and terrains. Whether you just want a recipe idea, want to understand how to fuel and train towards your next run event, or need reminding that not everything on social media is attainable or even realistic, this is the book for you.

The purpose of this book is to help you to navigate your journey and understand how to train appropriately, based on you and your training age. It is to help you stop comparing, be realistic about your expectations and actually get the best out of your running.

Over the course of the book, I will cover how my own journey working with runners and becoming a runner myself has influenced my knowledge and, as in my previous books, I will aim to bring my practice to light with case studies and personal anecdotes. I will explore running in detail, covering different types and distances, but also provide education around where you are in your

own journey and when it is time to get some external support and help. There will also be numerous practical tips and suggestions on nutrition and fuelling, and a whole section on some of my go-to, tried-and-tested, budget-friendly recipes.

Enjoy,  
R x