

# Become an Agnostic Eater

Coach and sports nutritionist Matt Fitzgerald explores why diet fads wreck runners

By Danielle Roberts

**A**s runners, we often see eating as a conflict between the necessity of having to fuel our bodies appropriately but also wanting to eat something pleasurable. The size of today's diet culture is just one indication of how much we've internalized this conflict and have over-complicated our relationship with food in trying to find the one true way to maximum health, enjoyment and performance.

Far from the mainstream of diet culture agnostic eating endorses an individual belief that doesn't side with any specific diet fad but rather is based on science and nutritional facts. It's a concept in which no food groups are excluded in order to optimize nutrition and health, a definition that Matt Fitzgerald explains in his book *Diet Cults*. This empowers an individual to establish their own beliefs and justifications when it comes to the food that they're eating.

While many diet fads often hold true to their physical claims most fall short on science and some have even caused detrimental changes in how we view certain types of food. Regardless of the claims, there is no one true way to eat.

As I discovered through some of Fitzgerald's research, humans thrive on a variety of diets and nutrient ratios and our bodies are extremely receptive to any changes made within them. We need proteins, carbohydrates and fats but there is no specific ratio for how much of each is necessary in achieving optimal health. Given this information, our own ratios will differ, which is why some of the top athletes in the world are the largest group of agnostic eaters.

You won't find too many elite runners advocating for a special diet and that is because elites eat to perform and won't risk losing out on nutrients and fuel by skipping a particular food or group. Elite runners know their food science. The agnostic part of their approach comes into where they choose to get these nutrients, and whatever the ratio, each athlete will use whatever works best for them. Most of us aren't ever going to

run at an elite level but we would like to be able to perform and recover as efficiently as one. So while their agnostic regime will be different from your own there are a few things that we can learn from them.

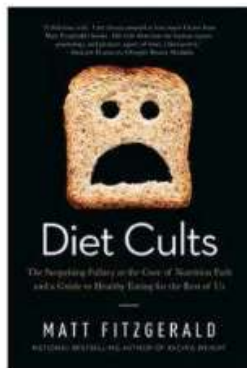
Elite athletes eat very few processed foods but that doesn't mean that they never do. Part of eating agnostically is eating within your own means with the focus being on your nutrition and pleasure. You may not be able to eat farm fresh eggs or grass-fed beef the way American marathon record-holder Deena Kastor does, but you can build your own agnostic regime with equal alternatives

based on a simple food table. Additionally, even a pro like Kastor recognizes the importance of pleasure and celebration and includes items like cookie dough and wine on her shopping list.

Within Fitzgerald's book, he advocates the benefits of coffee, wine and even chocolate (provided it's 70 per cent cocoa) and discusses the importance of enjoyment. Just because something tastes good that doesn't make it bad. Fitzgerald isn't alone in his beliefs. Nutritional

psychologist Marc David has detailed how guilt, anxiety and fear actually causes digestion and metabolism to shut down whereas pleasure triggers relaxation responses that assist with digestion. He also emphasizes eating slower. Savouring food gives you an appreciation for what you're eating. This results in eating less, and chances are you'll find that some things just don't taste as good as you initially thought.

Eating agnostically is unique to each who pursue it but its roots are simple and by far more effective than any diet fad in establishing a healthy and lifelong relationship with food. What works for some, won't for others but if you stick mostly to the essentials and make the most of your eating pleasures you'll be rewarded with optimal health, performance and enjoyment and be rid of the guilt and the confusion created by diet culture.



By Mary Luz Mejia

This is a classic, go-to condiment eaten with right-off-the-grill, sizzling beef steaks, especially in Argentina. It can however, also be served with grilled pork or chicken if you like, or simply drizzled on roasted Yukon gold or sweet potatoes.

## Ingredients

- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup red wine vinegar
- lemon zest of 1 organic lemon
- ¾ cup chopped fresh parsley
- ½ cup chopped fresh oregano
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh chives
- 1 small head of garlic, separated into cloves and peeled
- 1½ tsp sea salt
- 1½ tsp crushed red pepper flakes
- 2 tbsp warm water

## Directions

1. Finely mince garlic and put in a medium-sized bowl. Add minced parsley, lemon zest, chives and oregano to garlic. Stir and add red pepper flakes as well as salt.
2. Whisk red wine vinegar and olive oil into the mix. Add water.
3. Combine all ingredients and let stand for at least 2 hours for flavours to blend in a glass, sealed jar. Serve at room temperature with the protein or vegetable of your choice. 