GUTTING IT OUT

by Wes Adams



Here’s a recent run that might really impress some of you dads and moms out there: It was 0.3 miles long. It lasted precisely four minutes. My top speed was a blazing 10:07 pace. I burned 57 calories.

So what’s to brag about?

I never thought I could do it.

I was pushing a running stroller but that wasn’t what slowed me down. In fact, the stroller was empty, since I’d just dropped my second grader off at school and was on my way back to the house. On the trip to school, I could only walk, but with the lighter load on my return I decided to drop the hammer. I’m in training for the NYC Marathon, after all. Never waste an opportunity to grab some miles.

I’m including a map of the run from my Garmin upload. The route resembles a large intestine, which is fitting. From the green sections, you can see I got up to speed two separate times, for a half a block or so each time. The yellow and orange sections are obvious signs of where I ran into trouble, preceding a couple steep slides right into a red zone. And those were some intense red zones.

I burned 57 calories on that run, which is like half a sport gel. But that 57 calories matches about how many calories I had taken in over the preceding twenty-four hours so there was some kind of equilibrium even if I wasn’t feeling at all balanced.

Does the brand name SUPREP mean anything to you? If you are a guy who’s crossed the fifty-year mile marker it probably does. And I’m sorry about that. If you’re younger than that, it is something that is coming your way in the future. And I’m sorry about that, too.

According to the packaging, SUPREP is . . . well, it’s not a bowel prep kit. It’s a BOWEL PREP KIT, as capitalized by the design and marketing departments at Braintree Laboratories Inc.

Between us let’s stick to lowercase.

A bowel prep kit is not really a kit. A kit sounds like something fun, with gadgets and gizmos. Nothing like that here. The SUPREP kit comes in a cardboard box about as big as what your last pair of running shoes came in. It is a box large enough for the package designer to really go to town with the words BOWEL PREP KIT and related language, just to make sure that you are as embarrassed as possible when it is handed over by the heavily inked Williamsburg hipster who is ringing up your sale at the cash register.

The kit consists of an 800-page instruction manual that you will never read, a Quick Start pamphlet which you will glance at, two 8-oz bottles of evilness, and a commemorative 16-oz plastic cup emblazoned with the SUPREP name along with the command FILL TO THIS LINE.

The evening before my run, after having been on a clear-liquid fast since breakfast, I ingested the first of the two doses at 8 p.m. Diluting it in H2O does not disguise that I was drinking devil water, as my friend calls it. With the grape flavor just making things worse, it is a true cocktail from hell.

A mixture of sodium sulfate, potassium sulfate, and magnesium sulfate, the solution is described in a chirpy definition by the manufacturer as “an osmotic laxative indicated for quality cleansing of the colon as a preparation for colonoscopy in adults.”

Yes, I was undergoing my first colonoscopy, as instructed by my internist a year and a half earlier. She’d even gave me the name of the guy she uses for herself. But it took me this long to man up and make the appointment.

All was well for an hour or so after the first dose. And then the intestinal tsunami hit. Followed by many others. I was lucky because I have a son still in diapers so we have plenty of wipes in the house. You’re gonna want to have them gentle wipes on hand because your toilet paper turns to sandpaper before too many visits to the porcelin throne.

Four hours later I collapsed into bed. Or maybe I passed out on the bathmat and used a bar of soap as a pillow. I couldn’t tell you. I was so dizzy from hunger and still had the taste of the devil’s cocktail in my mouth. And my quality cleansing was only halfway over.

At 5 a.m. my running watch alarm awakened me so that I could dose myself with the second bottle. What a bracing morning beverage. An hour later the fun began again, but with each bathroom visit I found my output getting clearer. By 10 a.m. I was as clean as a whistle and the water I drank on one end was coming out a half hour later just as clear at the other. Quality cleansing indeed! It almost felt like something to be proud of. Almost.

But my morning run had been at 8 a.m. when I still had some cleansing to go. I needed to take my son to school, which is a half mile away. I always run him there in the Ironman stroller then loop home on an easy four with the empty stroller or lock up the stroller and do something longer and harder.

Running—and marathon training—is all about testing your limits, so I couldn’t resist trying to run home. The situation down below felt fluid. Very fluid. The red zones on the Garmin route map indicate the moments when the fluidity became a real and present danger. But I ran. I pushed through the gut-level discomfort, even if I didn’t want to push too hard because, well, you get the picture.

But I made it. And after what I’d been through, the procedure at noon that day at a midtown clinic was no big deal. Once I was gussied up in my hospital gown, a cool anesthesiologist named Joanna took me under her wing and gave me extra IV saline because, she said, “you runners are always a little extra dehydrated.” She also told me she’d put a friend on an IV drip the night before last year’s marathon to hydrate her. Blame the SUPREP but I was a little in love with Joanna. My doctor came in to meet me and had a soothing bedside manner and really sharp-looking shoes. I was a little in love with him, too.

“Colon cancer is the number-three cancer killer for men,” the doctor told me. I said the prep was pretty deadly too and he liked that.

In the hospital room where the procedure took place, I got situated on the bed, propped on my side, staring at a giant TV screen on the wall that was about to show a dark, twisting program I didn’t want to see. But Joanna had me covered. As she started pushing the knockout drug into my IV, she told me I’d hear a ringing in my ears. I also noticed that the doc had music playing in the room. “Spill the Wine,” one of the great songs of all time, was summing things up:

*But there I was, I was taken to a place
The hall of the mountain kings
I stood high upon a mountain top
Naked to the world
In front of
Every kind of girl . . .*

*Out of the middle came a lady
She whispered in my ear
Something crazy*

Actually, it was the doctor who whispered into my ear. And what he said was the opposite of crazy. It was a half hour later and Joanna was bringing me back to life. The doctor smiled and told me that all was well and he’d see me in ten years. Then he and his cool shoes were gone.

I felt great. I was ready to eat. Ready to rumble. But Joanna said no running for the rest of the day. “You can do a double tomorrow,” she said. And she left me on the saline longer than usual so I could really get prepped to hammer my morning run. Again.

WES ADAMS is the father of three kids and lives in Brooklyn. He is a children’s book editor at Macmillan and is training for his ninth marathon. His website, [www.rundaddio.com](http://www.rundaddio.com), features posts by runners in the NYC-area and beyond, for runners everywhere.