

Be Well...Fed

By Rob Lockey

Not only can you be fit, well trained, healthy and ready for an event, you can also be prepared in how to supply your body with the correct nutrition for life and activity. Many event participants show up only two-thirds prepared for the days adventure, thinking about food for the event just the day before.

Event fueling should be practiced many times over to allow for a fine tuning of "How" and "When-How Much" to take in to sustain the body for the duration. Listed out below are suggestions to set up a day of feeding success.

The "How": Well, food/hydration goes in your mouth, at least for now. Maybe in the future we'll have some sort of patch that sticks to the working muscles and is taken in transdermally. This will be cool because we'll get around one of our biggest limiters, the stomach/digestive system. Until that future arrives, we have the good old 'down the hatch' of food intake. Many forms of food are available; these are talked about in the macronutrient states of Carbohydrates, Fats and Proteins. Real food stuffs contain various amounts of these from the good old banana, and granola bar to the complex PB&J sandwich. Simpler forms are manufactured to bring out the easily digestible sugars we need as a fuel for endurance activities. These are the gels, and drinks produced by many different companies. So, the "How" is as simple as food equals fuel and getting this fuel in your stomach for digestion helps the muscles perform activity.

The "When-How Much": Of course before, during and after the event, which everyone knows. It's surprising how easy it is to mess this up and find that it's been hours since you ate or you haven't consumed enough. Before an event, consume a meal 2-3hrs before. This meal should consist of all the macronutrients and one that you've honed to work well for you. During an event, especially if it is longer than 2hrs, take in 200-400 calories an hour. Do this over the hour by getting 30-70 calories every ten minutes. This concept is important to understand, small amounts over time will assist the digestive system in getting the fuel where it is needed. Large amounts of food at once (which happens when feeding at aid stations) will cause digestive distress since the body's blood supply is routed away from the GI Tract to the working muscles. Smaller athletes will take the lower end of calories and larger ones will be at the upper end. Of course, practice finding your upper limits of fuel intake, so you can maximize your potential.

After the event, getting food in within thirty minutes to 2hrs will maximize your body's uptake. This after ride intake should once again contain all the macronutrients. Don't worry about overeating per se, the body is depleted from the activity, and we're not able to consume the same amount we have expended while performing the activity. This will help you get back in a balance sooner and more prepared for the next day. Surprisingly, chocolate milk is a great post ride fuel; it will get the digestive system ready for more real food.

Think of food as the gas in the tank of your car. When you plan a trip in the car, you pack it up with all the items you need on the trip, baggage, spare tire, etc... The last thing you do before heading out on the highway is to fill up the tank with gas. If the trip is long enough you have to repeatedly refill the tank to get to your destination.

Weeks, even months before the main event, practice pre/post and during training fueling. Experiment with different types, amounts and combinations to polish your fueling strategy. This will help you show up to the event fully prepared and ready to have a successful day.

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