

Find A Fox Newsletter April 26, 2009—Nutrition and Recovery

If you've never taken part in endurance sports before, you may wonder how to keep your body moving over a long period of time. What should I drink? How much should I drink? Do I need to eat? Unfortunately, the answers to these questions are personal, and you'll have to figure out your own answers over time. You can monitor your hydration by weighing yourself before and after a workout, and by monitoring your urine color. Anything darker than lemonade indicates you are low on fluids.

That being said, there are a few general guidelines:

- It's better to hydrate with a few swallows every 15-20 minutes than one big bottle every hour.
- The International Marathon Medical Directors Association (IMMDA) recommends sports drinks (which contain carbohydrate fuel for the body as well as electrolytes to replace what's lost in sweat) for workouts longer than 30 minutes.
- According to IMMDA, faster runners (faster than 8 minute miles) will need 30-36 oz of water per hour, while slower runners (slower than 10 minute miles) need only half this amount. But again, your hydration needs will depend on your unique body's sweat rate in whatever weather conditions exist at the time.
- Some experts recommend carrying something to eat if your workout will last longer than sixty minutes; others put the threshold at 90 minutes. Experiment to find out what works for you so that on race day, you know what to do.
- The food you consume during a long workout should be easy to carry and easy to digest. The general rule of thumb is 30-60 grams of carbohydrate per hour (this adds up to 120-240 calories per hour). The lower end of the range corresponds to a 100-pound athlete, while a 200-pound athlete has greater energy needs (the upper end of the range). The calories can come from sports drinks, gels, raisins, gummi bears, whatever works to get carbohydrates into your system.

It's important to give your body something to work with when you're starting a workout, too. If you work out in the morning, this means some sort of breakfast. You'll learn over time what your body will tolerate. Some people can eat a banana and a piece of toast and dash right out the door for a run, while other stomachs are finicky and rebel if you try to eat much at all right before a run. I belong to the latter category, so if I want to roll right out of bed and go for a run, I

use a sports gel as “breakfast” and carry additional gels with me. But I find that I can bike with a bowl of cereal in my tummy with no ill effects. The goal is to get some carbohydrates into the system—however you manage it.

After a workout, it’s important to restock your body’s energy stores. At a minimum, get some carbohydrates into your system. Some research suggests that combining carbohydrates with protein in a 4:1 ratio improves recovery. This doesn’t have to be complicated. A half a peanut butter sandwich or a glass of chocolate milk might be just what you need.

Learn the lingo

Bonk—this is when your body runs out of glycogen, its primary fuel. You may feel weak, shaky, or disoriented. Another term for this experience is “hitting the wall.” It’s your body telling you, “fuel me!” A good way to deal with this is to slow down, take in some calories, and wait to feel better. It doesn’t usually take long.

Dehydration—occurs when the athlete fails to replenish fluid lost to sweating and the body does not have enough fluid to carry out its normal functions. Depending on an individual’s sweat rate and the conditions of the day, it may not be possible for the body to absorb fluid as fast as fluid is lost. Therefore, it is important to begin workouts in a well-hydrated state.

Hyponatremia—this refers to the condition of low salt (sodium) in the body. It can happen if, during a very long effort (four or more hours is an oft-cited rule of thumb) an athlete hydrates but fails to replace electrolytes, effectively diluting the salt remaining in his or her body.

It’s especially important to be alert to the possibility of hyponatremia because symptoms can mimic those of severe dehydration, including confusion and muscle weakness.

Fox and Kit chat

Kits, you might want to ask your Fox:

- How do you decide what and when to eat and drink?
- How do you carry nutrition on the bike? What about the run?
- What are some of your preferred sources of fuel during training and race situations?
- How does the time of day of your workout influence your nutrition strategy?