

Pre-Event Eating: When and How Much?

Have you ever “bonked” or felt “flat” during your training or competition? There is a lot of hype and theories about pre-event meals but little scientific evidence to support them. This is probably because there are too many individual differences and other variables such as stress, age, time of day, exercise intensity, and duration to make across-the-board recommendations.

INTENSE EXERCISE

With intense exercise your body shifts 80 percent of its blood supply to the muscles in use. This shift deprives the stomach of the blood needed to digest food. This slows digestion and may cause an uncomfortable feeling in the stomach because of undigested food that is still present. A meal that is high in calories will take longer to digest than a lighter snack. It is suggested a three to four hour delay between high calorie meals and intense exercise.

MODERATE EXERCISE

During moderate exercise, the stomach is still deprived 60-70% of its normal blood supply due to muscle exertion. Athletes are recommended to wait 2-3 hours after a small meal and 1-2 hours after a blended or liquid meal. There are energy “boost” supplements such as PowerGel by PowerBar that are consumed by the athlete immediately before and during exercise. They can be easily digested and they provide energy during long-term events.

PRE-EVENT GUIDELINES:

Game day is not the time to experiment with foods that are unfamiliar to your stomach. Eat foods that are familiar to you.

Eat meals that are reasonably high in carbohydrate and low in fat (avoid high fat sauces on pasta and fast food). Carbohydrates will help keep the energy level high, while fatty foods delay digestion.

Drink adequate amounts of fluid (avoid dairy). The American College of Sports Medicine recommends 17 ounces of fluid two hours before exercise, as well as enough fluid during exercise to replace the water lost through perspiration. A rule of thumb is to drink enough water to urinate clear prior to performance. For the first hour of aerobic exercise use water only. Use electro-light replacement drinks after the first hour of exercising.

Use caution with foods that have a high sugar content (such as soft drinks and candy). Since athletes metabolism is higher than the average person they may experience a drop

in blood sugar following consumption which can result in light headedness or fatigue and loss in performance.

Eat well the day before an event, especially if you tend to be jittery or unable to tolerate food on the day of competition.

**Remember to

1. Always plan ahead for what you are going to eat
2. Obtain adequate amounts of protein
3. Work on Flexibility
4. Supplement your diet with a fish oil and multi-vitamin

Let me know if I can help. Email me at architectsports@gmail.com

God Bless,

Alan Tyson

Physical Therapist, Athletic Trainer, Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist