

RACE DAY FUELING

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In Formula One racing, fuel suppliers engage in extensive testing programs to find the optimum balance between power, consumption and engine wear – they even go so far as creating different fuel blends for different circuits and different weather conditions. So why is it that triathletes – who often spend months training and hundreds of dollars on coaching programs - don't do the same? The season is just beginning so this is a good time to think about, prepare and experiment with what will be YOUR optimum race day fuel – believe me, it can make a big difference to performance.

So what are the basics? Your race is approaching – how do you design an effective race day nutrition plan? First, ask yourself the easy questions:

- Your **race, predicted time** and **effort level** – how many hours will you be racing? Will it be close to threshold the entire time?
- **Weather** – what's your appetite like on a hot day versus a cold one? What about your hydration requirements? How much do you sweat?
- What's going to be **on the course**? For example, if Gatorade is the fuel of choice then do you like it? Or do you know if you like it? Start practicing with it. If you don't like the race day choice then think about how you will bring your own fuel – Bento Box? Camelbak? Bars in plastic baggies?
- **Taste** – if you don't like what you're drinking and eating....then you won't eat or drink it!

After you know these answers – for example, you're aiming to do a 5 hour half-ironman in hot sunny St. Croix, Gatorade is the race course of choice but you don't like it so you've decided you need to bring your own tasty fuel – then you need to look at the following:

- **Hydration** – how much? You should aim to get approx. 1-2 bike bottles (24oz) an hour depending on the temperature and your sweat rate.
- **Liquid versus solid**? Liquid will empty the stomach a lot faster (usually 15 mins for a sports drink to get to your muscles) than solid food – so for a Spring or Olympic race all liquid might be better but in a half-ironman or ironman a solid choice might be more appropriate.
- How **much fuel**? You should aim to get **60g of carbohydrates per hour** (60g x 4kcal a gram => 240kcal an hour)/ This is just a guideline so depending on your weight and metabolism this amount can vary. Here are some examples of common 'fuels' and their carbohydrate amounts:
 - A Cliff bar has 45g carbohydrates
 - One scoop of Carbo Pro has 28g carbohydrates
 - Carb Boom gel has 27g
- The **type of sugars** and fuel: **maltodextrin** is a chained complex carbohydrate which means more 'fuel' without GI distress. Check your sports drink/bar/gel but for longer races especially I'd advise using a complex carb solution....
- What if the drink has **many sugars**? Even better! Drinks that have many different sugars (read the label – for example: maltodextrin, fructose, glucose....) mean that different transport mechanisms are used to bring that fuel to your working muscles – this is a good thing! So aim to get a drink/bar/gel that has more than one sugar type.
- **Fructose** – if it's the primary ingredient I'd steer clear since studies have shown it's more likely to cause GI upset. If it's the second (or lower) ingredient – don't worry.
- **Sodium / Electrolytes**: these are especially important in hot weather races however sodium needs vary tremendously – on *average* a person loses about 350mg per hour but some of us can sweat ten times this amount and others half. Know your

body and how much sodium it needs. Also look at the drink (if any) you will be consuming – how much sodium is already in it? How much sodium is in the bar you are taking etc.? Do you need to take electrolyte tablets?

So now, let's pull all of this information together and create a plan (...which of course you will test in training!) – the first table is just an example. Please note tastes and race day fueling strategies vary tremendously so *please* do not follow this plan unless you know it will work for you.

SAMPLE PLAN:

Category	TIME	Example
RACE Name		St. Croix
Distance		Half Ironman
Predicted Time		Approx. 5 hrs or less
Breakfast (at least 2 hours before)		Apple, whole grain muffin w/banana, coffee
15 mins before		½ Zone bar
Swim	35 mins	- (no food)
Bike	1 st hour	Carbo Pro – 2 scoops (2 X 28g) = 56g all liquid
	2 nd hour	Carbo Pro – 2 scoops (2 X 28g) = 56g all liquid
	40 mins	Carbo Pro – 1 scoop (28g) all liquid
Run	1 st hour	2 Carb Boom gels (2x 27g) = 54g
	Last 35 mins	Gatorade to sip, CarbBoom (27g)

CREATE YOUR PLAN:

Category	TIME	YOUR Race
RACE Name		
Distance		
Predicted Time		
Breakfast (at least 2 hours before)		
15 mins before		
Swim		
Bike		
Run		

Experiment in training and best of luck!

Melanie Ashmore is a New York based licensed massage therapist, personal trainer and health/food counselor. She has over ten years of triathlon race experience – from sprint to Ironman distance. Her dietary approach is based - as much as possible - on minimally refined, whole foods since she believes the body runs best -- and fastest! - on clean, natural fuels. More details can be found at www.melanieashmore.com.