

Endurance Sports Nutrition by Monique Ryan

Your tax refund is in the mail, spring is finally here, and the first quarter of the 2008 racing season is finished. Now is a good time to check on your progress and move your nutritional goals up on the priority list to ensure that they are receiving the proper focus. While you may have completed some early season races, chances are that you are building to more important races that take place in the next few months.

Weigh your body-composition goals

There is always a strong emphasis on becoming leaner to get faster by improving your strength-to-weight ratio. Be realistic, though. Keep in mind that everyone has his or her own best body-composition level, based on genetics, age, and level of training. The biggest mistake is getting hooked on a number on the scale and not knowing what contribution fat and fat-free make toward that reading. Fluid shifts also greatly affect scale readings.

Get a body-composition evaluation and set goals for changes in lean mass and fat mass, not just body weight. You can have your body-composition evaluated with calipers, bioelectrical impedance or hydrostatic weighing. All include some degree of error; just be consistent with the technique and the technician. When using your own body-fat scale at home (bioelectrical impedance), make sure that you use one that has an "athlete mode" and that you check levels when well hydrated and with an empty bladder. Your starting number is just that, a starting number; look for changes over time to monitor your progress.

If you already had an early season body-fat check, now is a good time to evaluate your game plan. If your weight has not changed much, perhaps muscle mass has increased as you leveled off your resistance training. If you still have body fat to lose, you should allow at least 10 to 12 weeks to drop fat. Keep deficits to reasonable drops of 300 to 500 calories daily, allowing for energy for training and preventing strong hunger moments that can lead to consuming larger portions than intended. If you have less time before an important race, plan to lose no more than one to 1.5 pounds weekly.

Focus on timing and quality

Calories do matter, especially consuming the right amount of calories at the specific times around your training program. But first, focus on quality in your daily diet.

Make sure that meals and snacks not consumed around training sessions are wholesome with minimal processing and rich in nutrients. Try new foods, such as whole grains that are not a regular part of your diet, and increase the variety consumed from fresh fruits and vegetables. Invest in some new ideas for all meals and perhaps even spruce up your food-preparation skills.

Regular grocery shopping and simple meal preparation are good investments in your training program and health. It is important to limit eating out if you are trying to trim some fat. Organize your week for meal preparation: Keep an organized kitchen; make a grocery-shopping list, and have plenty of dry goods on hand. Stay on top of fresh produce as these foods go a long way toward keeping your immune system healthy.

Food timing and choices are also important right around training sessions. At this point in the season all your workouts matter, so make sure that your body can run on plenty of good fuel.

Before training, consume a high carbohydrate meal or snack. You can push the carb portions higher as digestion time increases. Three hours before training, you should have plenty of time to consume a good meal providing moderate portions of lean proteins, and ample amounts of carbohydrate. These carb servings top off both muscle and liver glycogen stores.

You may need to have a high carb snack two hours before training. Know what foods are comfortable for you and aim for 100g or so of carbohydrate. You can even top off an earlier meal (about three hours before) with 50g of carbohydrate in the hour before training, sticking with very easily digested choices.

During training, a good sports drink will maintain blood glucose levels, an essential fuel source during training and for maintaining focus and concentrations. Sports drinks also supply fuel when muscle glycogen stores run low. Within 30 minutes after training, aim for at least half a gram of carbohydrate per pound of body weight. You can also add 10 to 20g

of high quality protein to the mix. High glycemic carbohydrates work best to accelerate the recovery process, especially if you plan to train again in less than 24 hours. Of course rehydration is important, so have fluid and sodium in the recovery mix.

Refine training nutrition strategies

By race day you should have determined your favorite sports drink and flavor, and have planned your strategies for fluid, fuel, and electrolyte replacement. Here is where the scale can actually provide useful information.

Check your weight before and after training (preferably in the buff) to start determining your sweat rate. Every pound of weight loss represents 16 ounces of sweat that you did not replace during training. When you do this weight check, you should also track how many ounces of fluid you consume. To keep the math simple, practice this during a one-hour bike ride. Your hourly sweat rate is the amount of fluid that you consumed during the ride plus the amount of weight lost during the ride converted to a fluid equivalent. For example if you lose one pound (16 ounces of fluid) during a ride and consume 32 ounces during that ride your sweat losses in that hour were 40 ounces.

Experiment with various sports drinks. Drinks with multiple carbohydrate sources have increased absorptive capacity. Gels and energy bars, and higher sodium sports drinks may also be used during training and racing. Keep experimenting to determine what products, amounts and strategies work best for you. As the season progresses and the weather turns warmer, you can recheck your sweat losses and monitor your efforts to minimize dehydration during training.

If you are still focused on muscle building, make sure that you consume at least 20g of high quality protein and 25g of carbohydrate within the hour before and the hour after resistance training. While your daily protein intake is important, timing of protein intake is crucial to your muscle building efforts.

Don't forget the basics

No matter the time of season, it is important to stay well hydrated. Pale urine indicates that you are drinking enough throughout the day. Pre-hydrate before workouts as well with 16 to 24 ounces of fluid in the 60 to 90 minutes before training. Besides consuming carbohydrate before, during, and after training, you should also have plenty of whole grains and fresh fruits and vegetables in all your other meals and snacks.

Triathlon