

**Who, Why, What, When and How of Sports Nutrition for Cycling Topic 2: Nutrition
Preparation for the Solo Lake Taupo Cycle Challenge**
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The cycle routes and trails around New Zealand are a hum this time of year with one question every cyclist wants to ask, “Are you doing Taupo?” The solo 160km circumnavigation around Australasia’s largest lake has been enthralling cyclists for years and now with 15 different categories including mountain bike races, more people are signing up and getting involved. I am one of those new people, and I’d like to share my nutrition training tips.

In the second of the series of “Who, Why, What, When and How of Sports Nutrition for Cycling” articles for Bike Exchange, we look at key nutrition preparation for an endurance event from a personal perspective of Associate Sports Dietitian Becky Jones. Read on for more information.

Who:

“It’s the body, not the bike, that pedals” is one of the Cycle Challenge’s mottos, and I couldn’t agree more; preparing the body should start with the fuel. Whilst a training program for most cyclists undertaking an endurance event is common, a nutrition plan often isn’t. More experienced cyclists may have a rehearsed plan for fueling long rides but the picture isn’t so clear prior to training sessions. A good nutrition plan should be part of every cyclist’s program and the benefits of being well fuelled for long training sessions and race day itself should not be underestimated as we find out later on.

Carbohydrates are the key nutrients in providing energy before exercise as our bodies store these in the form of glycogen in the muscles and liver. Individuals have different energy needs but during a training program most people will need more carbohydrate to help fuel the weekly rides and the long ride at the weekend. Generally speaking recreational cyclists, like myself, will need less carbohydrate than higher-level cyclists who have heavier training schedules and ride at a faster pace. The exact amounts of carbohydrate needed also depends on other factors like your overall nutrition and training goals, so if you’re looking for an individual plan then make an appointment with an Accredited Sports Dietitian.

Why:

Have you ever done a training session and thought, “I wish I hadn’t eaten that beforehand?” I know this has happened to me! After weeks of hard training you want to cross the finish line feeling the best you can and enjoying the moment, not regretting your food choices.

For long training sessions over ~90 minutes the benefits of eating before include topping up your carbohydrate stores to help your body physically prepare. This will help to reduce fatigue and maintain intensity or pace. It also provides the opportunity to practice with different foods to see what works for you and what doesn’t, which can help you plan your pre-event meal. Developing a routine with eating and drinking before training also aids mental preparation and can provide confidence in your planning.

What:

For any long ride, carbohydrates are the body’s preferred energy source, and not having enough can limit your performance. Carbohydrates are found in a range of foods like bread, rice, pasta, potato, kumara, milk, fruit and confectionary. Your meal or snack checklist should include some foods and/or drinks that contain carbohydrate for energy, are easy to digest, low in fat and perhaps fibre too (if stomach upset is an issue). Most importantly, the foods you choose you

should be familiar to you. I do not recommend trying anything new to eat before race day or for your pre-event meal!

The list below provides some examples of foods that are suitable before a training session or pre-event meal and contain approximately 50g carbohydrate.

- 1-2 cups breakfast cereal and low fat milk
 - 2 slices toast or bread with jam or honey or sliced banana
 - 2 slices fruit toast with 150g yoghurt
 - 2 English muffins or crumpets with jam or honey and 250ml flavoured milk
 - 1 large bread roll with lean meat/egg/fish/cheese filling and banana
 - Large plain or fruit scone with jam
 - 100g pancakes with 2 tbsp. syrup
 - 300g creamed rice
 - 1-2 sports bars (check labels for carbohydrate content as can vary)
 - 1 serve canned spaghetti on 2 slices toast
 - ½ ready to heat rice pouch with a plain tomato sauce
 - 250-300ml fruit smoothie
 - 500ml low fat flavoured milk
- http://www.ausport.gov.au/ais/nutrition/factsheets/basics/carbohydrate__how_much

The amount of carbohydrate you need for training and in the lead up to the main event will depend on what level cyclist you are, what pace or intensity you will be riding at, and of course the distance you plan to cover.

For riders who suffer with nerves resulting in an upset stomach, reducing the fibre content of the diet in the 1-2 days prior to the race should help reduce the gastrointestinal discomfort. Trying a liquid based meal (e.g. Sustagen Sport Powder™) or a smoothie may be better tolerated on the morning of a race than solid food. Alternatively simple techniques like swapping wholegrain versions for the white options e.g. bread or pasta may help. I prefer to have a lower fibre breakfast on my early training mornings that consists of a large bowl of cornflakes with low fat milk, 1 tbsp. sugar, a medium sized banana, water and tea.

When?

The timing of your pre-training snack or meal is often determined by what time you train and how long you plan to ride for, with longer rides needing more fuel. Research suggests the optimal timing for pre-event fuelling is 1 – 4 hours before to allow good digestion but just like your choice of preferred foods to eat beforehand, your timing should be individual too.

From a practical point of view it's also a great idea to simulate your timing strategy for race day, so if your event has an early start, like 6am, then practice training and eating around this so there are no surprises on race day. For my training I'm comfortable and happy having my pre-training snack or meal about 2 hours before. I have practiced this on many occasions and this feels right for me. On the other hand, my training partner can eat within the hour. People respond differently and it's important to understand what works for you.

- Final stages of nutrition preparation: In the last two days before your event like the 160km you should start to increase the amount of carbohydrate rich foods in your daily eating plan and taper your training. This will allow your muscles and liver to store more fuel (as glycogen) to prepare for the forthcoming event and “carbohydrate load”. Familiar and easy to digest carbohydrate

sources such as pasta, rice, bread, milk, tinned fruit, jam, honey and sports drinks are good options to consider.

For information about what to eat and drink during your rides then check out the great SDA factsheet on Eating and Drinking during Sport.

How?

If you're doing any of the Cycle Challenge Lake Taupo events then there is still time to tweak your current habits and incorporate some of these nutrition strategies into your plan. Here's a quick summary of the top tips for your best nutrition lead up yet:

- **Always start well fuelled** – Beginning a training session or event feeling energised from a carbohydrate based meal/snack will help your performance
- **Experiment with the timing of meals/snacks** – Trial different times from 1 – 4 hours before your training sessions to establish what your preferred approach is for energy levels and gastrointestinal comfort
- **Carbohydrate loading** – Start in the 2 days preceding your event and aim for a regular meal and snack pattern which includes carbohydrate rich sources. Remember to taper your training at this time to allow your body to prepare adequately
- **Practice!** – It's a good idea to practice any nutrition strategy at least a handful of times before race day to work out the ideal approach for you

For a tailored approach for your individual circumstances, seek the advice of a Registered Dietitian who specialises in sports nutrition. To find a Registered Dietitian in your local area go to www.dietitians.org.nz/find-a-dietitian/

Good luck to all of you competing at the Cycle Challenge Lake Taupo events or any other grueling endurance cycle event!

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