



Fuel for Triathlons

NUTRITION TIPS FOR SHORT AND MEDIUM DISTANCE TRIs

You've worked hard training so take some time to plan and practice your nutrition and hydration for race day. In short and medium course triathlons, less is more. Practice and experience will help you understand your unique nutrition needs.

Short Course: Sprint distance: Swim 400-500 yards, Bike 12-15 miles, Run 3.1 miles

Medium Course: Olympic distance: Swim .9 miles, Bike 24.8 miles, Run 6.2 miles
in kilometers: Swim 1.5 K, Bike 40 K, Run 10 K

Pre-race nutrition:

Carbohydrate loading is only effective for endurance races over 1.5 hours so it is unnecessary for sprint triathlons. It might be useful for Olympic distance races especially for athletes with a sensitive stomach who find it difficult to eat and drink while racing.

Increase carbohydrate (pasta, rice, bread, potato, cereals) starting 1-3 days before your race. Decrease fiber (beans, whole grains), spices and increase salt by adding to foods. Avoid gassy foods the day before (broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, and beans).

Keep hydrated so urine is pale in color. Avoid under-hydration (urine is medium-dark color). Avoid over hydration (urine is clear like water).

Race morning:

Regardless of the race distance, it is wise to arrive at the race fed, well hydrated but with an empty stomach meaning breakfast was 2-4 hours before the start. Eat a high carbohydrate, low fat breakfast 2-4 hours before (smoothie: fruit, milk, and yogurt; or cereal with milk and a banana). Some athletes get up early in order to eat several hours before an early morning start. It is always best to eat what you have found works for you during training so be sure to practice this to learn what foods you tolerate for breakfast.

Drink approximately 16-24 oz of water or sports beverage 2-4 hours before the start. This fluid will improve your hydration but will have left your stomach and bladder within this time. Take another few sips or 5-8 oz as tolerated about 30 minutes before the race. Athletes who can't eat enough at breakfast might want to eat a gel at this time (25 gram carbohydrate).

During the race:

Nutrition needs during short and medium course triathlons depend on the amount of time it will take to finish: Less time = less nutrition needed.

Also your pace will affect your ability to eat and drink: Faster pace = harder to eat.

Short course:

Faster athletes will finish a sprint triathlon in 1 hour so they will finish before their body's fuel stores are used up. These athletes may not consume any nutrition or might want to take small sips of water or sports drinks only. Athletes on the course for multiple hours will want to consume carbohydrates (30-60 gm/hour). 1 gel has 25 gm carbohydrate, 8 oz sports drink has 15 gm carbohydrate. Sports drinks help racers meet both carbohydrate and fluid needs.

Medium course:

Faster athletes will finish an Olympic distance triathlon around 2 hours so they many want to start adding sources of carbohydrate (gels, blocks, etc) after 1-1.5 hours. Most athletes will finish closer to 3 or more hours so consuming carbohydrate (30-60 gm/hour) will help to maintain speed and endurance.

Hydration:

Drinking too much water can lead to hyponatremia, low levels of sodium in the blood. Avoid this condition by using a sports beverage with sodium and understanding your sweat losses. Drinking too little can lead to dehydration. A loss of $\geq 2\%$ body weight during exercise can cause a significant decline in your performance. You can find the right balance by doing a sweat rate test to figure out your unique fluid needs. Pay even closer attention to proper hydration when racing in hot or humid conditions or at altitudes above 8000 ft.

Sweat rate = weight lost + fluids consumed in a give time (usually tested in 1 hour).

Example: In one hour lose 8 oz weight + drank 16 oz fluid = need 24 oz/hour to replace sweat loss. You will be more likely to tolerate larger volumes of fluids if you drink them at frequent intervals (4-5 oz every 15 minutes). Fluids leave the stomach faster this way. You likely do not need to match your sweat losses precisely, but it's a good idea to aim for around 75% of your fluid losses and avoid losing $>2\%$ of your body weight from sweat loss. Keep in mind that your sweat rate will vary depending on temperature, humidity, wind, and altitude. Also you can train your gut to handle the amount of fluid and nutrition you need to perform well. This means every training session over 1.5 hours is an opportunity to practice your race day nutrition plan.

Check out <http://data.gssiweb.com/fluidLoss> for an easy to use sweat rate calculator

Recovery Nutrition:

Congratulations! Your race is over, but your nutrition plan is not. In the finish shoot you will be handed more fluids and mostly carbohydrate snacks. Eat and drink what you can 15-30 min after you finish, then follow this up with a meal containing protein, carbohydrate and fluids. Many athletes prefer to use a recovery drink or chocolate milk followed by a meal. Make sure you have recovered with proper nutrition and are rehydrated before you reach for your celebratory beer.

Sports Nutrition Services are available for Kaiser Permanente Colorado members.

To make an appointment with a Sports Dietitian / USA Triathlon coach call: 303-614-1070