

Nutrition



DURING THE REGATTAS

The aim of your race day is to maintain energy, speed, strength, power, skills and concentration for the whole day. Regatta days involve short high intensity spurts of exercise and fatigue is inevitable. To stay ahead of your competitors means planning to reduce or delay the onset of fatigue as much as possible. Paddlers are not always able to consume their energy needs throughout the day so should be well prepared before the day begins. Have nutritious carbohydrate food supplies on hand for between races. Don't rely on the event site to supply appropriate needs.

Examples include:

- Sandwiches with low fat fillings
- Yoghurt
- Fruit and fruit juice
- Fruit and/or nut bars
- Rice crackers with vegemite, honey or jam
- Small tin baked beans
- Small serves pasta or rice dishes
- Nuts and sultanas
- Sports gels

Recent research suggests that the carbohydrate doesn't even have to be digested to have an effect. Swilling a sports drink around your mouth before spitting it out also leads to better performance where extra muscle fuel isn't an issue. It appears that receptors in the mouth and throat alert the brain to the incoming carbohydrate and behave as if it has been absorbed (Burke 2010).

Don't forget your fluid intake. Paddlers can quickly become dehydrated, especially on hot days, after intense races or even from standing in the sun watching races. Too little water impairs the body's regulation of heat resulting in increased body temperature and an elevated heart rate, fatigue, reduced mental function and slowed gastric emptying. Keep plenty of water on hand and drink small amounts regularly (aim for one cup every 15-30 minutes during intense exercise) rather than large amounts at once. Include an occasional small amount of sports drink, flavoured milk or juice to satisfy taste and top up carbs.

The amount of fluid you need to take will depend on body size (larger athletes usually sweat more than smaller athletes), genetics (some people just sweat more than others), the fitness of the person (fitter people sweat earlier in exercise and have greater sweat volume), environment (sweat loss is higher in hot humid conditions), medications and exercise intensity. The best way to estimate sweat loss is to weigh yourself before and after an exercise session. Each kg of weight lost is approximately equal of one litre (L) of fluid and can be measured against the amount of fluid taken during the exercise (e.g. if you weigh 1 kg lighter after exercise and have drunk 1 L water, you have lost 2 L fluid during the exercise).

Watch for signs of heat exhaustion or even heat stroke.

Heat exhaustion symptoms are flu like with throbbing headache, nausea, cool skin, chills, sweaty, pale, weak pulse. You should immediately stop exercise, drink water or a sports drink, cool off and do not resume sport until you are completely recovered.

Heat stroke is a life threatening condition. Symptoms include confusion or behaviour changes which can rapidly lead to convulsions and loss of consciousness. This should be treated as a medical emergency, an ambulance should be called; the athlete should be cooled as well as possible with removal of clothing, dousing with cool water or fanning with wet towels.

Hydration tips:

- Start an exercise event in fluid balance – drink before each race or training session
- Drink regularly throughout training sessions and don't rely on being thirsty as your guide to drinking.
- Drink small amounts regularly rather than one large amount.
- Replace fluid loss in the 4-6 hour period after exercise.
- Remember that alcohol increases urinary output and fluid loss. Alcohol should be avoided before, during and immediately after exercise.