

Spirit of Belron Challenge Event

Training tips - nutrition



What should I eat and drink when I exercise?

What you eat and drink in the weeks, days before your race and even on the day will make a big difference to your performance.

A varied and well balanced diet that meets the energy demands of your training is essential. A balanced diet should include bread, potatoes, cereals, fruits and vegetables (at least 5 portions every day), together with moderate amounts of milk, dairy products, meat, fish and small amounts of foods containing fat and sugar.

Having a diet that's high in carbohydrate is an essential means of providing your muscles with the energy needed to exercise and recover quickly afterwards. The body's preferred source of energy is carbohydrates and this is stored in your muscles and liver as a fuel called 'glycogen'. The body's glycogen stores are limited so you need to eat plenty of carbohydrates to keep these stores topped up. Good sources of carbohydrates are pasta, rice, bread, cereals and potatoes.

Carbohydrates

Following a balanced diet gives you energy to exercise longer and harder without tiring. We get energy from all types of food but the best source for the muscles is glucose, which comes from carbohydrates (sugary and starchy food). Glucose is stored in the liver and muscles, where it is readily available when you exercise.

The amount of carbohydrate you need depends on how much exercise you do, how hard you push yourself and how fit you are. The more glycogen you have stored in your muscles, the longer you can carry on for, which is important for marathon running or long distance cycling. Bread, cereals, fruit, beans and yoghurt are good sources of carbohydrate. Avoid high-fat carbohydrates such as cakes and biscuits.

Burning fat

During gentle exercise, you get most of your energy from fat. Exercising at a slightly harder rate uses more glucose and calories. If you keep going, your body will gradually use more fat in order to save limited glucose stores. The fitter you are, the more efficiently your muscles can burn fat for energy, and the longer you can exercise without getting tired.

Protein

There are many protein drinks and supplements on the market, and it's easy to think you need extra protein to work out regularly. Protein helps to build and repair muscles and is a source of energy, but it's only top athletes who may need a bit extra - most of us actually eat more protein than we need.

Drinks

It's really important to keep your fluid levels topped up when you exercise - this will help you perform better and recover faster. It's easy to get dehydrated without realising, so don't

wait until you feel thirsty, and drink plenty before you start exercising. Keep some water to hand while you're exercising and drink lots when you finish.

Drinking water is great for moderate exercise. If you're exercising continuously at a high rate for more than an hour then you may need a high energy sports drink.

Sports drinks contain carbohydrates, which are easily absorbed by the body, and give you some extra energy to prevent fatigue. However, they're also full of sugar, which means they contain extra calories and can be bad for your teeth.

It takes only 1% dehydration to begin to stop the body from functioning and reduce your exercise performance. When you become dehydrated your ability to compete is dramatically reduced and harder to concentrate.

Here are some top tips from nine-times champion and triathlon coach Richard Allen:

Remember - keeping hydrated and energised are vitally important for success. When you train or race, and are exerting yourself, you sweat out the body's fluids and these are essential for keeping the body's temperature at a correct level and a lack of fluids will result in the body overheating quickly and performance being impaired. Additionally, as you exert yourself you suffer the further physical effect of reducing blood sugar and nutrient levels in the body which in turns lowers energy reserves making you tired..