Fueling for Long Distance Triathlon Training and Racing

This document will cover some basic points of nutrition and hydration for long distance training and racing. For more in-depth coverage, seek the advice of a sports' nutritionist or look for sports' nutrition books.

There are several general principles to follow to correctly fuel your active body. First, eat a variety of natural, unprocessed foods including fruits, vegetables, lean meats, nuts, low-fat dairy products and whole grains. Second, you should try to consume approximately 60% of your calories from carbohydrates, 25% from healthy fats (unsaturated fats such as olive oil, canola oil and raw nuts and seeds) and 15% from lean proteins. Third, hydration is extremely important, and you should drink plenty of water throughout the day. (If your urine is light in color you generally are well hydrated—if it is dark yellow, you could be dehydrated and may need to increase your fluid intake.)

During long distance training and racing, it is important that you carefully select the foods that you will eat prior to, during and after training or an event. For pre-event or pre-long distance training, you should aim for one to four grams of carbohydrates per kilogram of body weight (kilogram-body-weight is weight in pounds divided by 2.2 – or 4.55 kgs. per 10 lbs.), one to four hours prior to the event/training. The closer you are to the start of your event or training session, the fewer calories you should consume. These calories can come from liquid or solid or a combination of both. Use your long distance training sessions to find out what will work best for you come race-day.

Just as you need to rehearse what you will consume prior to the big event, you also need to rehearse what you will eat during the event. Fueling for an iron-distance event is critical, and you must have your nutrition plan in hand well before the big day. For an event/training session that is one-to-three hours long, you should aim for approximately 120 to 240 calories per hour. For events/training sessions in the three-to-six hour range, you may need to jump to 250 to 400 calories per hour. If your event/training session is going to last over six hours, 400 to 800 calories per hour may be necessary.

Remember, nutritional needs vary by the individual, and you will have to find out what works best for you. Some fuel choices could include: sports drinks (be sure that they contain electrolytes –sodium, magnesium and potassium), bars, gels, fruit and pretzels. You will need to experiment to see what tastes best (the better it tastes, the more likely you will consume it) and what sits best in your stomach. Find out what kind of sports drinks and foods will be offered at the event. If something does not work for you, you may have to carry additional food or drink on the bike and run. For hydration, you should aim for 1-to-2 bike bottles (~20 to 40 ounces) per hour. This is just a guideline, and you

will need to determine how much fluid you actually need and then adjust that intake according to weather conditions.

Following long training sessions or races, you need to focus on recovery. Consuming approximately 1.5 to 2.0 grams of carbohydrates per kilogram of body weight within 20 to 30 minutes after exercise can help speed your recovery. Some studies have suggested that including some protein in your recovery meal/drink will aid in the absorption of the carbohydrates. The key is, however, to get in enough calories within the short window of time following your event/training session.

Fueling for long distance events must be viewed as another component of your training and race-day preparation. What you consume before, during and after events/workouts has a tremendous impact on how you feel and perform and, just as importantly, how fast your body recovers from the stresses of training and racing.

So, Bon Appetit!