



NUTRITION FOR EVERYDAY ACTIVITY

A basic function for everyday eating is to replace fuel (energy or kilojoules) and fluid lost from the body due to daily activity. Those undertaking a gentle exercise program will acquire enough energy from food to replace energy lost due to activity by following general guidelines for healthy eating. We suggest using the Healthy Eating Pyramid as a model. However, as exercise sessions become longer and harder, fluid and fuel intake needs to increase.

The fuel requirements for events of up to about 90 minutes in duration can be met by the normal muscle glycogen stores of a well trained individual. (Glycogen is the body's ready source of energy stored in the muscles.) To fuel up, all you need is 24-36 hours of rest or lighter training, and a higher carbohydrate diet. Although a high carbohydrate diet should already be on your menu, you may like to reinforce the focus on "fuel foods" on the day prior to competition.

What is carbohydrate loading? Who needs to use this strategy?

Carbohydrate loading is a special strategy used to "superload" muscle glycogen stores before events of greater than 90 minutes duration that are performed at high intensity with little scope for eating and drinking during the event – for example, a marathon or Ironman triathlon. By extending your refuelling techniques to include 3 days of rest/taper and high carbohydrate eating, you may be able to increase your muscle fuel stores to 150-200% of their normal levels. This extra fuel may be needed towards the end of these prolonged events to stop you from "hitting the wall".

However, there is no advantage to having higher levels of fuel stored if your activity does not demand it. Furthermore, your activity may not allow or require a 3 day taper. So, despite the widespread recognition of carbohydrate loading as a sports nutrition tactic, it is really only useful for a number of endurance and ultra-endurance events. Unfortunately some people equate carbohydrate loading with overeating, particularly with high fat favourite foods such as chocolate, rich cakes and deserts, and pastries. This approach is not sensible and can result in a bloated feeling and excessive weight gain. Instead, stick with fluids and carbohydrate foods that are low fat and nutrient rich.