

Sports Nutrition III

Eating for competing

By Dr. Boyd Williams
Certified Chiropractic Sports Physician

Amidst the controversy in sports nutrition, one thing that is agreed upon among researchers is the importance of what and when to eat foods and drink fluids to improve athletic performance. One area of great importance to the athlete is endurance. Examples may be the pitcher who can no longer throw the fastball late in the game, or the runner who loses his pace at the end of the race. The lack of stored carbohydrates in the body are frequently limiting factors in athletic events which require endurance. "Hitting the wall" occurs when muscle glycogen levels fall to very low levels. The athlete can improve endurance by using specific training and dietary methods that increase liver and muscle glycogen stores, glucose production, and decrease muscle glycogen usage.

Foods high in complex carbohydrates should be emphasized to promote glycogen stores. The current recommended percentage of total calorie derived from complex carbohydrates for the athlete is somewhere between 55 and 70 percent, with the higher percentages necessary in prolonged endurance sports.

In contrast to previous methods of carbohydrate loading to maximize muscle glycogen stores, it is now recommended endurance athletes follow a high carbohydrate diet throughout training and begin a tapered rest approximately seven days prior to the event, with complete rest the day before the event. The goal for the athlete is to increase the daily carbohydrate intake for the seven days prior to competition, maximizing muscle glycogen deposition. It is important for both athletes and coaches to realize maximizing muscle glycogen stores will be beneficial only to athletes participating in endurance events (more than 90 minutes) or multiple-event competitions and this should be utilized only three to four times per year.

Some important tips for eating and drinking on the day of competition include:

- 1) eating the pre-game meal three to five hours before competition,
- 2) eating food during competitions of longer than two hours will benefit performance,
- 3) water should be drank before and every 15 minutes during exercise in warm weather to prevent fatigue, dehydration and heat cramps,
- 4) cold drinks are preferred because they are absorbed faster than warm drinks.

Following these important dietary guidelines will help the athlete to attain the highest levels of drug-free performance.

For more information on this or other health topics, including information about our services, go to www.creatingfamilywellness.com/ or call 281-4878.