



An Update from the Water
Spring 2007

Race prep nutrition

Race day tips

Practice drinking and eating during training. Get comfortable with what your stomach can tolerate so you will be able to stay ahead of the fueling game with familiar drinks, gels, bars and food – have a plan. Liquids leave the stomach sooner than gels and gels sooner than solid foods. Practice so you can reach a strong and smiling finish.

Remember that if 'race nerves' seem to have your stomach in knots, you will be fine if you have been eating meals rich in carbohydrates the week before. If you simply cannot eat right before the race, then make an extra effort to take in plenty of complex carbohydrates the day ahead. You can eat late in the evening and still race comfortably the next morning; your muscles will be loaded with glucose (fuel) for your competition.

Be sure to drink ample fluids. Aim for two cups of water or a 6% Sports Drink two hours before the race. That will give you plenty of time to digest, find a restroom and reach the race start well-prepared. Drinking another half to full cup of fluid right before race start is also a good idea.

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Rowing races can be a fueling and hydration contest – with some scenery thrown in. The goal is to maximize your calorie intake, thereby enhancing your performance, without pushing your system over the edge and exceeding your stomach's capacity to absorb nutrients. This can be tricky and needs to be practiced in training before it is effective on race day. At one point or another, a rower's weak link is usually the stomach so, If you can capitalize on nutritional fueling, you'll be well on your way to a Personal Record (PR) race with a strong and comfortable finish.

The classic mistakes with hydration and fueling are not 1) drinking adequately (becoming dehydrated), 2) taking in enough calories before (or during the race, in a long distance race) and 3) paying attention to the need for salt or sodium (electrolytes).

Even a 2% water loss through sweat during exercise will result in a decrease in performance and a reciprocal increase in effort. By the time you experience a 6% loss, dehydration has set in and it will be difficult, if not impossible, to come back from this state. Studies have shown that athletes slow in their performance approximately 2% for every 1% loss of body weight. So it is important that your intake of fluids match your losses through sweat. Measure your losses by weighing before and after a hard training row; rowers average one liter per hour unless you are a heavy sweater, it is very hot, or the intensity is 'all out'.

To delay fatigue and maintain peak performance, you need to replace carbohydrates BEFORE glycogen stores get depleted. The average maximum amount of carbohydrate you can absorb and burn during exercise is between 200 to 240 calories per hour, or about 1 gram (four calories) per minute of exercise. Eat more and you will be in trouble because extra carbohydrates will be stored as fat and the metabolic process of storage takes precious energy away from your racing muscles (and can cause gastric upset). Additionally, carb storage also takes extra water. Ingesting less than your ideal amount of carbs means you can't 'catch-up' on energy when you begin to feel fatigued and hypoglycemia (low blood-sugar) takes its toll. So, start the race fully fueled.

Electrolytes, especially sodium and salt, are more crucial in longer rowing races as the effects of sweat loss and ensuing dehydration become cumulative in longer rowing races (more than an hour). As the heat, duration and the intensity of an event increase, sodium loss becomes critically high. Sweating leaves the blood thicker, making the heart work harder, raising the pulse rate. The need for salt can vary according to the weather and an athlete's sweat level, so be sure and take in electrolytes via sports drinks and eat some salty snacks the day before the race. Arrive at the start line topped-up on water and be sure to take a water bottle with you in your boat.

Row fast! Row fueled!

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