



Pre-Race Fueling...A 14-hour Approach

Article by Sonni Dyer

There is no line of questions more consistently asked by tri-clinic attendees than:

- "What should I eat the night **before** a race?"
- "What should I eat the **morning of** the race?"
-and, finally.....
- "How should I **warm-up**?"

These questions are interrelated in that they beg for the **ROUTINE** that one must develop and follow prior to each race. And that **ROUTINE** begins w/ 14 hours to go before the gun goes off.

In essence, any action that immediately precedes and effects the race outcome is, somewhat, part of that race.

Moral of the story: **Don't take it lightly, it's as much a part of your race as the swim start or transitions.**

14-hours

Why 14 hours before race-start? Well, consider that a normal race-start time is 7 or 8am, Work backwards and you find that "t-minus-14 hours" is about 4pm or 5pm the evening *before* the race.....dinnertime the night before.

The 'night-before' pre-race meal:

The night **BEFORE** the race is NOT the time to eat something "special", different, and new. When it comes to the digestive tract and race fueling, we want NO SURPRIZES.

What we **ARE** looking for is a high complex-carb meal that's easily digested that also has a proper amount of protein (15 to 25grams) added with it.

Things to **AVOID** in the 'night-before' meal are:

1-**fat**it slows digestion

2-**fiber**can make getting down to 'race-weight' (ha,ha) less predictable on race day (ie: bathroom stop)

3-**simple sugars**wreaks havoc w/ insulin levels, sleep patterns, further sugar cravings, and disrupts a predictable, steady supply of energy throughout the race.

My 2 favorite pre-race meals are chicken-breast or pasta or sweet-potatoes & salmon. VEERRRY PREDICTABLE and you can usually find one of the two at a restaurant the night before the race.

The 'morning-of' pre-race meal:

Just as important as **what** you decide to eat is **WHEN** you eat it.

We, at TRImyCoach.com, contract & work with an endurance nutrition technical advisor named Steve Born. We do this because research into new practices and products changes this field almost monthly. It's simply our BEST way to ensure that our athletes have the most current information.

In recent years, part of that evolving information firmly suggest that the '**morning-of** pre-race meal be ingested a **FULL 3 HOURS BEFORE THE RACE-START.**

Otherwise, insulin and blood-sugar levels are peaking and falling at a time that YOU are gearing up to compete. Eating only 1 to 2 hours before race start has 3 VERY bad consequences:

1-because of high insulin secretion.....your fat (metabolism) '*usage*' is hindered & limited.

2-and because fat is NOT used as much.....you deplete your carb (muscle glycogen) stores SOONER.

3-you're at a much higher likelihood of stomach cramping during the race since digestion is dramatically slowed by pre-race nerves.



NOT GOOD!

Eating 'simple sugars' (rather than complex carbs) BEFORE-hand has the exact same, detrimental effect. So your 2 rules of 'morning-of-race' eating are: **a)**-eat 3 hours before race startand **b)**-eat no simple sugars immediately before a race.....and it would help if your 'morning-of meal was liquid-only or limited in solid intake.

Now, let me rock the boat a bit, here, and define, exactly, some examples of pre-race foods with "simple sugars". They include:

- Power-Gel™ (3rd ingredient is fructose)
- Gatorade™ (primary ingredient is sucrose)
- Orange Juice
- honeybun
- raisins
- many cereals

• I can already hear the outrage, now: "*Are you telling us to NOT ingest Gatorade or Powergels just before the start of a race?!?!"*

And I'll assure you that this is EXACTLY what I'm suggesting if your drink or gel contains SUCROSE (simple sugar). Many "performance" food/drinks contain simple-sugar because they're marketed for taste above performance. Further, for races that are longer in duration, simple sugars can cause 'gut-shutdown', especially in hot weather, and the ensuing nausea that accompanies it.

Our athletes use Hammergel™, Endurolytes™, and Sustained Energy™, rather than Power-Gel™, Gatorade™, and R-4 Endurox™, for these very reasons. [But, rest assured, that there are many other *endurance-nutrition* issues & reasons as well.]

• Another objection would be: "*If my race starts at 7am, does this mean that I have to have finished eating by 4am?!?!"*

That's right. BUT.....know that the goal of this pre-race meal is only to "top off" **LIVER** glycogen stores. **MUSCLE** glycogen, the 1st fuel to be used in a race, should be already full from the 'night-before' pre-race meal.

So, in essence, the '*morning of*' meal could be missed altogether without harm provided that you began to fuel within 5-10minutes of race start (so that's it's still in the stomach).....or shortly after race-start (like after the swim). And for me, if it's a decision to sleep an hour more or force down food when I'm not hungry.....I'll stay in bed to be well rested.

For a sprint race (60 to 110minutes).....it's likely that you have enough stored fuel to finish without major fueling. No calories at all or as little as 200calories in a flask w/ water is plenty to assure a good finish.

For Olympic distances and longer (2+ hours).....you'll want to supplement w/ complex-carb calories @ periodic intervals mid-race, anyway.

If you **DO** opt to get up early and get something on the stomach 3 hours prior to race start, stick w/ a complex-carbohydrate liquid drink mix like Sustained Energy™, (250-300 calories) and a plain bagel or dry toast. If you're a coffee drinker and must have your "fix", then it's best to do so without sugar.

I preach all this because it seems that, on race morning, the only line longer than the one to the porta-potty is the one at a hotel's "continental-breakfast"90minutes before we hit the beach.

The Warm-up:

I wouldn't advise arriving at a race-site later than an hour and a half before the race begins. There's just TOO much to do. Again, '*routine*' is your friend. You want to be able to put your routine on auto-pilot and focus. And that routine may go something like this:

1--park



Pre-Race Fueling...A 14-hour Approach

Article by Sonni Dyer

2--air the race-tires

3--proceed to transition to secure your spot (*being VERY mindful of others, who're present or not, who've staked their spot on the rack*)

4--drape a towel or jersey/shirt over your rack-spot to reserve it.....& go warm-up on the bike, getting body-marked on the way out.

5--return and set-up your transition area

6--lightly jog

7--stretch

8--recheck your transition area

9--wetsuit on (if applicable)

10--enter the water and perform some drills to warm-up for the swim

• [After steps 4, 6, and 8.....you should hydrate w/ some WATER. **Again, avoid simple sugars this close to race-start.**]

The **duration** of your ez bike spin, run and swim warm-ups (steps 4, 6, & 10) will vary according to the distance of the day's race, your experience, and any logistical issues that the race site presents.

The rule has been: the *longer* the race, the less warm-up you require. Which is to say that the *FASTER* the pace.....the *MORE* warm-up you may require. However, regardless of distance, I like to warm-up the same duration every time (bike-20minutes, run-10minutes, and swim-5minutes). Routine, routine, routine.....& no surprises.

NOTE: I know of athletes who prefer to warm-up in the **reverse-order** of the race.....run first, then bike, then swim.

To me, this presents "logistical stress" on race morning because you can't finalize your transition area until the bike is there, and I'd rather have this done sooner than later. Also, in this order, what if you run over a piece of glass while spinning or notice that the bike isn't shifting well? Would you rather have 20minutes to resolve it.....or 60minutes?

As far as "**how hard**" one should warm-up (**warm-up intensity**) before a race, one should make the effort very easy and gradual and include one or two 1minute efforts at race-pace.....NOT faster.

In fact, researchers in the U.K. found that:

".....when comparing three different warm-up intensities, that the highest intensity treadmill effort, {carried out @ 80% of VO2-max}, resulted in **lesser** staying power during a subsequent all-out test compared to two carried out at lower intensities and was **NOT** significantly better, in this respect, than sitting in a chair for the same length of time."

So during the warm-up.....get **TO** race-effort/pace, not beyond it, for very brief periods.

And as you stand nervous on the starting line, know that your previous "14 hours" have positioned you, ideally, for a breakthrough day. Go get 'em.

Coach Sonni Dyer

*****For more information on the [Studio7MultiSport](http://www.Studio7MultiSport.com) training programs, you can visit our website at www.Studio7MultiSport.com or email Sonni at Sonni@Studio7multisport.com .

References:

1. British Journal of Sports Medicine, vol 23(4), pp 233-236, 1989
2. European Journal of Applied Physiology, vol 48, pp323-330, 1982
3. Endurance Athlete's Guide To Success, Steve Born, pp27-29, ©2001