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10 NUTRITION STRATEGIES FOR THE BIG RACE DAY

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BY JILL CASTLE, MS, RDN

At the end of the season when you're laying everything on the line, don't let a misstep in nutrition or poor planning sabotage your goals. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you prepare for the biggest meet of the season:

1. Eat breakfast. Start races on the right foot by eating something first thing in the morning. Muscles and metabolism will get the carbohydrate and energy boost they need.



2. Eat at the meet. I'm not hungry, or I'm too nervous to eat. These are just two excuses for not eating at competition. Going for long time periods without food (namely carbohydrate) is a bad idea and will chip away at performance.

3. Be structured with eating. No skipping, delaying or erratic times for eating (ahem, midnight munchies). Even at the pool, space eating around events, keeping the pre-load/recovery eating cycle going. The body will perform at its best when it is fueled.

4. Don't experiment with food. Stay with tried and true foods your body can digest and tolerate while swimming.

5. Focus on carbohydrates. These are the body's first food resources for energy. Go for slow digesting carbs like oats, whole grain bread or bagels or starchy vegetables. When opting for pasta, hold the fatty sauces like Alfredo. Instead, go for marinara or a low-fat option.



6. Forget the fatty foods. These are best eaten later, not during competition weekends, as they will just drag the swimmer down, leaving him feeling full and sluggish.

7. Be prepared for hunger. Unexpected hunger can get the best of any athlete. Bring more food than you need. That's better than running to the concession stand for something less-than-ideal. Remember the adage: If you fail to prepare, you prepare to fail.

8. Keep it clean. Important races and meets are not the time for fast food, junky snacks, sugary desserts or candy. Stick with wholesome, real food like fruit, whole grain breads and crackers, and nut butter.

9. Quench the muscles. Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration and muscle cramping. Swimmers don't need to get fancy with sports drinks or other sugary beverages during competition, as most races are brief.



10. Sleep. Although not a nutrition recommendation, sleep is tightly tied to allowing nutrition to do its thing. Sleep is energizing and restorative, and the time of day when muscles are in major renovation mode, healing, building, strengthening and using all that good nutrition it received during the day. Don't sacrifice sleep!

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