

Nutrition tips for Fitz’s challenge: Part A: Nutrition plan before a long training ride

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It’s time to revisit your eating and drinking habits before, during and after your **training** rides in preparation for Fitz’s Challenge. Are you consuming what your riding buddies eat? Are you influenced by anecdote or the eating habits of professional cyclists? Are you swayed by marketing? Can you really rely on the advice of your riding buddies or the marketing messages from the sports food and supplement industry for the food choices you make? Are they right for you?

In my experience as a sports dietitian working with elite cyclists, I have observed bizarre and inappropriate eating behaviours among riders on the days either preceding an event or during it. At the last minute, they often deviate from my advice and from their practiced routines and come to grief during the event.

Irrespective of your age, level of ride fitness, the distance you usually ride in training and the distance you choose to ride for the Fitz’s challenge, you need to have a **Nutrition Plan** (i.e. **food and fluid intake plan**) that suits your individual physiology and training. What you consume in training is practice for the event. Don’t be influenced by others. Don’t be too rigid or inflexible. Your **Nutrition Plan** is not based on an exact science, despite the absolute values for nutrient intakes provided in the research literature. These values are upper limits and derived mostly from well-trained athletes cycling at very high intensity under laboratory conditions, not out on the open road. Experiment during training but be prepared to change - particularly if you already have entrenched habits that are inflexible and do not meet the tips in Table 1 below.

Every rider under my care has an individualised **Nutrition Plan** for training with enough flexibility in choice to cope with changing ride conditions. The basis for this plan comes from published research and is adapted for an individual’s food preferences, the potential effects of hard exercise on gut function and the varying distance and weather conditions. The **Nutrition Plan** is largely based on trial and error and is periodised to match the stage of training. Have you adopted bad habits before and during a training ride? Assess yourself today.

I have listed some nutrition strategies (and the reason for these suggestions) for you to consider, adopt and practice before long training rides that have well published benefits for performance and recovery. *Remember*.....

Test any changes to your usual eating and drinking choices in training before applying them on the day at Fitz’s challenge.

Table 1: Nutrition strategies before a long training ride

Before a long training ride	Rationale
Aim to eat before you ride.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fasting promotes rapid breakdown of <i>fuel</i> (carbohydrate) reserves needed for muscle activity during exercise and for nervous system function.• Fasting induces loss of lean body mass (muscle).• Fasting (or inadequate intake of food, particularly carbohydrate (CHO)-rich foods) before training is strongly associated with poor endurance capacity, early fatigue and poor recovery.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although the recently published research about training on a low carbohydrate intake '<i>train low</i>' and competing with a high CHO intake '<i>compete high</i>' may have metabolic advantages to enhancing higher CHO storage capacity (ie CHO loading) in the muscle. it does not necessarily translate into a performance advantage. <i>A long ride following an overnight fast and/or withholding CHO during a ride has more disadvantages than benefits. These include depressed immune and nervous system function with an increased risk of early fatigue, illness and injury.</i> Take care if you follow this strategy and seek professional advice from a sports dietitian.
If you usually avoid or dislike eating before you ride, you need to 'train your gut' to get used to it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start with <i>liquids</i> (e.g. small glass fruit juice, low-fat milk drink, meal replacement formula drink, sports drink), <i>then gradually add small amounts of solid foods</i> that contain both carbohydrate and protein and are low in fat (e.g. <i>breakfast cereal, fruit and yoghurt, muesli bars, bread</i>).
Don't overeat before a long ride, you can catch up with nutrients (that is carbohydrates) and fluid intake during the ride	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High intensity exercise delays the rate at which food empties from your stomach. The body position on a bike gives some people reflux. Regurgitation or indigestion is no fun for you or your ride buddies. <i>If this happens to you, it can be treated with dietary intervention and, in some cases, a combination of dietary intervention and medication.</i> Choose foods that don't usually give you abdominal discomfort.
Avoid high-fat, high fibre foods (fried snacks and fatty meals or snacks)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High fat food choices are associated with abdominal discomfort and nausea, especially when consumed just before a ride. Fat remains in the stomach much longer than protein and CHO. A large glass of full cream milk for example is slower to empty from the stomach than reduced or low-fat milk. Very high fibre foods, although recommended for good gut health, may not be the best choice as a snack just before a long ride. Fibre is not digested by the gut. It adds bulk to the faeces. Side effects of too much fibre the night before a long ride are increased flatulence, abdominal discomfort and gut pain, especially in those who routinely eat a low fibre diet.
Avoid consuming large quantities of high sugar foods (e.g jelly snakes, dried fruit, soft drink) just before a hard ride	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High sugar (and salt) intake shunts water into the gut from the intestinal cells, thereby contributing to dehydration at the cellular level. Small amounts are OK and often a lifesaver for long rides. <i>(Notice how thirsty you feel after drinking soft drink and a salty meal).</i>
Timing of food intake before a long ride or event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A small pre-training snack or light breakfast eaten around 60 minutes before a long training ride or Fitz's challenge is a common preference for many riders. Gels, sports bars and sports drinks are designed to be digested very quickly and can be consumed just before and during a ride with minimal chance of gastric discomfort. In practice, most riders can train their gut to eat a light breakfast or snack food at any time before a long ride and not rely on sports foods or supplements.
Ensure you are hydrated before	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My suggestion is to drink a large glass of water as soon as you

<p>you train. <i>Check your weight when you go to bed and again in the morning after your morning ablutions</i></p>	<p>wake up every day as a normal daily habit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of us wake up a little dehydrated. This includes those people who have a drink during the night. Metabolic water (in the cells) is continually used for metabolic activity during sleep and inactivity. Its turnover increases substantially during exercise. • Do not over-hydrate on plain water before you start. Better to drink in small amounts while you ride. (More about this in Part B. <i>What to eat and drink during a long training ride and Fitz's Challenge</i>)
<p>Caffeine and coffee before a training ride</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coffee (black) or with a small amount of milk on its own as a pre-ride nutrient source is inadequate. The effects are equivalent to fasting. A latte (made on skim or low-fat milk) is a better choice. • For susceptible people, coffee drinks on an empty stomach can induce reflux (heartburn).

For more general information about eating before training or competition, go to <https://www.sportsdietitians.com.au/factsheets/fuelling-recovery/eating-drinking-sport/> If you want specialised advice or an individualised Nutrition Plan, consult a sports dietitian who is trained to mix and match (periodise) nutritional strategies to your varying training sessions. Go to <https://www.sportsdietitians.com.au/> to find an accredited sport dietitian in your local area.

If you want detailed scientific information about sports foods and supplements, go to the <https://www.ais.gov.au/nutrition/supplements>

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