

Nutrition tips for Fitz’s challenge: Part C: Recovery after a training ride

Associate Professor Vicki Deakin

A long training ride is not an excuse to stuff yourself or reward yourself with energy dense foods and binge eat – a common practice among recreational cyclists. Think about your total food intake over a day, your typical daily diet (if you have one) and how the foods you eat after a long ride fit into your daily food intake.

Do you have erratic eating habits? Do you miss meals? Do you miss breakfast? Do you eat a lot of fatty take-away foods? Is your everyday diet important to you, to your health and to your well being? Do you look after yourself on the inside? As a sports dietitian working for over 25 years with elite athletes, my first priority was to address their everyday training diet and improve their food choices. Eating a good training diet is quite challenging in young elite athletes who have little time to shop and cook, little knowledge about food composition and limited cooking skills. They frequently resort to fast foods that may not be the best choice. Is that you?

Your training diet and recovery eating after a long training ride should suit you as an individual. Good daily eating habits (that is - a high carbohydrate, moderate protein and low fat diet) is important for maintaining training capacity, for recovery and for better long term health outcomes. Eat meals that contain both carbohydrate and protein. Typically most Australians eat the bulk of their protein from meat-based meals in the evening and eat too much protein in their total diet and not enough carbohydrate. This is the wrong ratio for both athletes and the general population.

Steak and salad, for example, contains hardly any carbohydrate. Fruit contains only traces of protein. Fruit is OK for a CHO-rich snack but not a replacement for breakfast or any meal...add yoghurt to fruit and/or breakfast cereal to provide protein. Spread protein intake throughout the day. Eat regular meals, plan your meals, eat a variety of different foods everyday from the 5 food groups, eat something from each of the five food groups. Go to <https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines> for information on these groups and serves sizes. These are some tips for your everyday diet.

If you want a prescribed or periodised diet with quantitative targets for CHO and protein intake for training and recovery that is individualised to your training and body mass goals, go to <https://www.sportsdietitians.com.au/> and make an appointment with an accredited sport dietitian in your local area.

The recovery eating strategies outlined in Table 1 allow rapid restoration of depleted energy reserves, repair potential muscle damage, rehydrate the cells and improve the body’s adaptive response to the stress induced by high intensity exercise.

Table 1: Nutrition strategies for recovery after a long training ride

Rehydrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consume fluid often and in small amounts after training. Same advice as in Part B (during training). Sports drinks are useful for rapid rehydration, rapid CHO uptake and electrolyte replacement, especially if your appetite is depressed and for gut comfort. <i>Your choice of fluid depends on what you consumed before and during the ride, the intensity of the ride, the weather and ride conditions and your state of fluid balance at the end.</i>• Learn to read the early signs of dehydration and heat stress in yourself and in other riders so you know how to prevent and treat it. See https://sma.org.au/sma-site-
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	content/uploads/2021/02/SMA-Extreme-Heat-Policy-2021-Final.pdf
Restore CHO stores	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of appetite is common both during and after a long ride, especially at high intensity. <i>Have you noticed that when you have felt hungry early in a ride, it often goes away after a while, especially if you increase the intensity?</i> Ignore this dampening of appetite. There is a physiological reason for this and the outcome is not good. Be pro-active. Eat to hasten recovery. Consume CHO-rich snacks, drinks or meals early after a long ride (i.e. within 20 minutes). This promotes recovery of CHO reserves at almost 3 times faster than consumed later on. The highest rate of muscle glycogen (CHO) storage occurs in the first hour after exercise. Aim for around 1g CHO/kg body weight/hr in a recovery snack or meal. Continue with CHO-rich snacks, drinks or meals throughout the rest of the day in your everyday diet. It makes no difference to your 24 hour recovery whether you consume food (or CHO) in liquids, smaller snacks (i.e. intermittent consumption) or as several meals.
Stimulate protein synthesis and muscle repair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consume high quality protein-rich foods soon after the ride (i.e. dairy foods, eggs, meat, fish). A milk drink or milkshake is a great recovery choice, if tolerated. It supplies CHO, fluid and electrolytes. Liquid meal supplements or a whey-based drink may be an alternative. Milk contains 2 types of proteins (in the curds and whey). Insoluble proteins are the curd proteins (casein) and soluble proteins are the whey proteins. Expensive protein supplements are unnecessary. Eat real food. Dairy foods (e.g. yoghurt and milk (not hard cheeses) contain carbohydrate as well as protein) so are a good choice. Protein bars are another option. These are usually whey based. Bread, cereal grains, nuts, seeds and nut milks (almond) and soy milk also contain CHO and protein (but of low biological value or quality). Fruits contain only traces of protein and mostly CHO and water. Starchy and root vegetable contain both CHO and protein (low quality). Only traces of protein and CHO are found in leafy vegetables. Compared with fruits, highly coloured vegetables have a higher density of vitamins and minerals, especially antioxidants (if you are interested). Avoid anti-oxidant supplements. They blunt the adaptive effects of exercise.
Food and snack choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For meal and snack suggestions go to https://www.sportsdietitians.com.au/factsheets/fuelling-recovery/recovery-nutrition/

There is so much misinformation and misleading marketing about food and nutrition. If you want credible information on issues in sports nutrition that is evidence-based, go to Sports Dietitians Australia and the Australian Institute of Sport websites. For practical information about food, food brands and recipes in relation to eating for health and well-being, go to <https://foodwatch.com.au/>

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

Part D of this series will cover the food and fluid choices at the aid stations on the different courses for Fitz's Challenge and at the event hub at Stromlo Forest Park. The event starts and ends there. Pedal Power ACT wishes you a safe and enjoyable ride through the beautiful Brindabella Mountains surrounding Canberra and welcomes you to the after party at the Hub to celebrate your achievement. Enjoy the day!

Author profile:

(Adjunct) Associate Professor Vicki Deakin is a keen rider and a member of the organising committee for Fitz's Challenge. She was the former Head of Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of Canberra and initiated the nutrition services at the Australian Institute of Sport and the ACT Academy of Sport in Canberra. She is co-editor of the 6th edition of the international reference textbook, *Clinical Sports Nutrition*, released in 2021.