



Aflac Iron Girl Syracuse Triathlon Planning Your Race Day Nutrition

By Marni Rakes, M.S.

Ask any sports nutritionist (or any veteran triathlete for that matter) and you will be told that proper nutrition is key for having the most favorable race day performance. Proper training is only one ingredient in improving your odds for a strong performance. When evaluating triathlon nutrition and the importance of race day nutrition, many athletes are considered fortunate to even finish a triathlon off a “no pre-race snack and one sip of sports drink during the run” type of game plan. Improper nutrient timing and an unwholesome diet runs the risk of gastrointestinal upset, losing your ‘oomph’ before the finish line and decreasing the opportunity for proper nutrient absorption.

Although the goal of any triathlon is to finish the race while having fun, the majority of triathletes will finish a sprint triathlon in less than two hours (top athletes in less than one and a half hours). Furthermore, the intensity of racing is high and the short racing time leaves minimal opportunities for consuming calories. Therefore, your caloric needs during a sprint triathlon are not as critical when compared to the energy expended during an Ironman. No matter what the distance, do not overlook the value of consuming a pre-race meal and the tendency to neglect your caloric needs during the race.

Pre-Race Nutrition

Equally as important to your intake of calories *during* the race, managing your nutrition *prior* to the race is essential for ensuring sufficient energy during a triathlon. The concept of carbo-loading is simple for any triathlete. To adequately stock muscle glycogen (stored carbohydrate in the muscle), consume a couple hundred extra carbohydrate calories a day or two prior to the event. Whether you enjoy pasta, pizza, pancakes or bread, carbo-loading is practical for loading your body with extra low-glycemic, whole-grain carbohydrates and not an excess of fat, fiber or protein calories. On race morning, it is essential that you consume some type of caloric snack in an effort to replenish your carbohydrate stores from your overnight fast. A small carbohydrate snack will not only stock the engine, but will keep you from feeling hungry during the race.

Race Day Nutrition

Based on scientific evidence, replacing every expended calorie as you are exercising is impossible. Accordingly, if you believe you burn 300 calories during a 5K run, your body only absorbs around 50% (at the most) of any ingested calories. The same theory applies to calories consumed during a triathlon.

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Sample Nutrition Plan

Pre-Race Dinner Options: *Eat before 6:30 p.m.

<p>Meal choice #1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 ½ - 2 cups pasta • 1 cup heated pasta sauce • Small dinner salad w/ fat-free dressing • 2-3 small whole-wheat dinner rolls • 16 - 20 ounces of fluid (water or diluted sports drink) 	<p>Meal choice #2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large sweet potato (no butter) • Side of rice • Small piece of fish or lean meat • Small dinner salad w/ fat free dressing • 1-2 small whole-wheat dinner rolls • 16 - 20 ounces of fluid (water or diluted sports drink)
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Evening snack - Granola bar (less than 150 calories) or 1 cup dry cereal

Morning Pre-Race Snack Options *At least 2 hours prior to race start

<p>Meal choice #1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8-ounce coffee • 20 ounces of water • ½ cup instant oatmeal • ½ ripe banana 	<p>Meal choice #2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8-ounce coffee • 20 ounces of water • 1 English muffin • 1 tablespoon peanut butter or 1 tablespoon jelly (low-sugar) • ½ banana
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30-minutes prior to race

- 8-16 ounces of sports drink and ½ sports bar or ½ ripe banana

Bike Nutrition

*Varies depending on body size, fitness level and prior experience

- 1-2 water bottles of sports drink or 1 water bottle of sports drink and 1 water bottle of water
- 1 gel (if practiced) – consume with water
- 1 hour or less bike ride: ≈ 220 - 240 calories (+/- 50 calories) during bike ride
- 1 hour or more bike ride: ≈ 220 - 240 calories (+/- 50 calories) during bike ride + additional 50 calories for every 30 additional minutes on the bike

Example: 90 minute bike ride = 220 + 50 = 270 calories total

Do not exceed 220-240 calories per hour! Drink every 15-20 minutes.

Run Nutrition

*Varies depending on body size, fitness level and prior experience

- Sip water at aid station (also use for cooling on body)
- Sip sports drink at aid station
- 30 minute or more 3-mile run: Consume 1 gel (if practiced) between miles 1 and 2 with water at aid station. If not using gel, consume sports drink at aid station.

Post-Race Nutrition Enjoy - the Iron Girl post-race catered Breakfast Café!