

## Nutrition in Ultras

Stomach problems can sabotage all that hard training you have done so its critical you have a strategy that works for you going into the Hounslow Classic.

Nutrition is a complicated topic but I'd like to break it down to 4 main questions

1. How much should I eat
2. What should I eat
3. When should I eat
4. What to do if something goes wrong.

How much should I eat?

This is governed not by how much energy you burn but by how much energy you can absorb. There is a big difference between the two and the gap comes from stored muscle glycogen and body fat.

How many calories can we absorb?

This figure depends on the types of calories but the general recommendations are around 60g of glucose and 30g of fructose ( Fructose is absorbed in a different way to glucose) . But given that so many people suffer stomach problems I recommend a strategy of eating the least amount possible in order to keep energy levels stable and get to the finish in the fastest time possible rather than eating the most possible. The less food we have to digest then the less chance of gastric upsets.

Factors affecting absorption

The concentration of the carbohydrates in your stomach affect absorption . Simple carbohydrates are absorbed fastest in a 5-8 % solution whereas complex carbs can be absorbed in concentrations as high as 15-18% .

What this means in practical terms is simple sugars need more water to be absorbed than complex carbs. Thats why sports drinks containing simple sugars are always 6-8% in concentration .

That's not to say that one is better than the other. Two of the major sports nutrition products in Ultras have opposite strategies. One uses simple carbs and the other complex carbs. Which one is best? That depends on the person.

Where to start ?

Experimenting in long training runs is the best way to learn what your energy requirements are and what carbs work best for you. Starting with approx 30-40g of carbs per hour, erring on the side of less rather than more.

What to eat?

The range of calories consumed in races is huge. From sports nutrition products like Tailwind, Hammer, V-Fuel, Powerboat, Endura to real food like nuts, dried fruit, sandwiches, home made energy balls, cooked salted potato wedges, fruit, and then processed foods and drinks like lollies, chocolate, coke, muesli bars, potato crisps. I have even heard of people have chicken drumsticks in an ultra.

There are a few factors that will influence your choices

#### 1. Practical Considerations

Can you transport it easily in your pack, can you unwrap it easily and will it survive extreme cold or heat. For example bananas might be your favourite food but try carry a few in your pack for a few hours and see what state they are in.

#### 2. Taste

If it doesn't taste good then you will struggle to consume it in an ultra. The problem is that what tastes good 2 hours into an ultra may be unpalatable after 10 hours or more. In your longest training runs it may taste fine but if the race takes twice as long as your longest training run then there is a good chance your taste buds may rebel later on in the race.

There is no way of knowing this until you have done a few ultras so it's important to try a range of foods and develop a menu of what foods go down well so in a race of option A is making you gag then you have option B and C to fall back to.

A good strategy for many people is to mix up their food choices every hour so they don't succumb to flavour fatigue. Whilst some athletes can take nothing but gels for a 100 mile race - others will feel nauseous after 3 hours of gels so trying other options is crucial.

Many find that even within the same brand of nutrition different flavours make a big difference . Most of the good brands use subtle flavours so they dont over power you later in a race.

Given that most nutrition products are sweet, mixing it up with something salty can prolong how long you can tolerate the product for. So for example mixing up a sports drink with some slices of boiled salted potato every couple of hours may mean you can tolerate that product for the whole race.

When should I eat?

Regularly and in small quantities is key. A large intake every two hours is going to be much harder to digest than a small amount every 20-30 minutes

What to do if something goes wrong ?

Prevention is always better than the cure but if things do go wrong then you only have a few options - choosing the right option is key

1. Stomach fine - energy levels low

The simple solution is consume more calories. If you are feeling very low then something like coke to pick you up fast may be needed but be aware there will be a crash in the near future if you don't get some other calories in your system.

2. Energy levels low and stomach feels full

You need to decide whether to drink more water or not. Think back to how much food you have had and how much you have had to drink , if you have had more food than drink then by drinking more water you will decrease the concentration of carbs in the stomach making it easier for them to be absorbed.

3. Bloating and nauseous

Adding more to your stomach will probably make things worse

You need to slow down and allow more blood to flow to the stomach to aid absorption. This may take hours and in the meantime you have very little calories to use.

One solution is a carbohydrate mouth rinse . It can trick the brain into thinking there is fuel in the muscles and give you enough energy to keep you going until your stomach can absorb what you have put in it. How long you can get by with just rinsing a carbohydrate solution in your mouth depends on lots of

factors but probably not more than hour or two depending on how fast you are running.

People have reported that ginger can help nausea in a race - Ginger tablets or ginger beer so that may be worth a try. Personally I have found coke helps settle a dodgy stomach as it promotes burping but any gaseous drink would have the same effect I would imagine.

#### 4. Flavour Fatigue

If your taste buds are rebelling at the thought of consuming any more of your planned food then try something different - try some salted food to give the taste buds a change from the sweetness of what you have been consuming.

Experimenting in training is key

Even if you find a particular gel is ok in your 4 hour training run - it may not be after 10 hours - have something else to fall back to .