

Nutrition to Help Athletes Reach Peak Cycling Performance

If you're trying to get the most out of your training, be sure your diet is in line with your goals.

Energy is the most important part of your diet, designed to meet your needs through calorie consumption. Different foods fuel your body in different ways.

MACRONUTRIENTS

Macronutrients are the cornerstone of your diet. These are the nutrients your body uses in the largest amounts.

Carbohydrates are the primary fuel our muscles use when we engage in high-intensity workouts.

Proteins are the building blocks that help repair and make more muscle.

Fats are also an important fuel for endurance activity, so keep them balanced in your diet.

MICRONUTRIENTS

Micronutrients are one of the major groups of nutrients your body needs for fuel, and include vitamins and minerals.

Vitamins help our bodies release the energy in foods and metabolism. They're necessary for energy production and immune function.

Minerals also help in the metabolic pathways and are the electrolytes that help us stay hydrated. They play an important role in growth, bone health and fluid balance.

Fluids are important to your performance and safety, so be sure you stay hydrated, especially as the weather gets warmer and more humid!

Your nutrition goals should match your performance and health goals! Set up a one-on-one consultation with an Ohio State Wexner Medical Center sports dietitian to learn more. Call 614-293-3600.



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

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Carbohydrates Are the Priority Fuel

Carbs are found in fruits, grains, dairy and vegetables

Humans are set up to burn carbohydrates as the primary fuel for exercise, especially at higher intensities. The higher your bike mileage, the more carbs your body will need.

You should have a minimum of 1.4 grams of carbohydrates per pound of body weight. If you're riding the mileage of an athlete, it would be even better to be at 2.3-3.2 grams per pound, or even higher if your total calories allow it.

If you're an adult trying to lose a few pounds, focus on whole foods over processed foods to get your carbs.

Pro tip: Carry carbs along with you on your long rides!

Proteins Are the Building Blocks

Proteins are found in meats, dairy, beans and nuts.

Research shows that athletes need more protein than sedentary people do. We recommend a target of 0.7-0.8 grams of proteins per pound of body weight.

When we eat too much protein, our body just uses the extra as energy or to store as fat. Lean proteins and low-fat dairy products may be better for our overall health when compared with high-fat products. Plant-based proteins, like beans, are also a healthy source of protein and can help you meet your carbohydrate needs.

Pro tip: Spread out the protein throughout your day with about 20-30 grams per meal, a little as a snack as well as a bit before bedtime.

Fats Are the Endurance Fuel

Low-intensity exercise is fueled primarily by fats.

The recommended amount of fat in our diet is 20-35% of calories. Most Americans get plenty of saturated fats, so when adding fats in the diet for good nutritional balance, add healthy fats like avocados, olives, olive oil and most varieties of nuts including nut milks. Remember, fats in moderation—even healthy ones. Any time you're biking at a pace where you can hold a conversation comfortably, you're likely using fats as the primary fuel.

Vitamins Are Important for Your Metabolism

With vitamins, more is not always better.

Some people think that if some is good, more is better when it comes to vitamins. But it's important to be careful because some vitamins can have levels that are too high for everyday consumption. Avoid taking vitamins labeled above 500% unless directed by your physician.



Minerals Help Us With Hydration and Energy

Minerals have very specific and important functions in our bodies.

Sodium, potassium and chloride are known as electrolytes and help us keep our body's fluid in balance. Calcium and phosphorous help our bones stay strong. Iron is important to helping us with endurance, because it transports oxygen around our bodies to make energy and keeps us from being anemic.

Fluids Ensure We're Well-Hydrated

Consider 1 milliliter of fluid per kcal of energy to formulate your baseline fluid intake.

Each pound of body weight you lose during a bike ride is a reflection of how much water you lost during the ride. Hydration is the sum of your fluid intake and the electrolytes (sodium, potassium and chloride) that help you hold your fluids in.

If you need to eat 2,000 kcals per day, start with 2 liters of fluid to be proactive, then drink to thirst on your rides. If you're a male who needs 2,800 kcals per day, then strive for 2.8 liters of fluid. To help you formulate your baseline fluid intake, we recommend 1 milliliter of fluid per kcal of energy.

It's also important to understand why your blood pressure level goes too high when you consume a little more sodium. If sodium brings your blood pressure up, then try something like extra potassium in the form of fluids like coconut water, or extra berries and bananas. Many cyclists like using supplements as a source of extra electrolytes.

For questions or concerns about your health, consult with your sports performance dietitian to learn more.