



Fuelling Fitness for Your Sport - Surfing

About Surfing

The Australian surfing population has increased markedly over the past 30 years. It has evolved from a somewhat bohemian activity to becoming a popular 'mainstream' sport. Although most surfers are males, females are starting to participate in greater numbers, from recreational to elite levels.

Elite competition requires a high level of aerobic fitness, co-ordination, flexibility, precise movement and whole body fitness and one of the key nutrition issues in surfing is preparation and access to nutritious and healthy foods.

Professional surfers typically compete in several events each year. Each event consists of several heats, which range from 20 to 30 minutes. Typically, a competitor's best 2 to 4 waves, out of a total of 10 to 15, are scored by a panel of judges. The number of heats in an event is dependant on the number of competitors. For example, in a competition with 48 surfers, there are three rounds, followed by quarter finals, semi finals and a grand final. Competitors reaching the final round in this competition may therefore compete in six heats, and this is typically in hot conditions.

Training Diet

A healthy diet for the professional or advanced surfer should include enough carbohydrate to fuel their sport and to recover from training and competition, adequate protein to help repair muscles following heavy workout sessions, and a good fluid intake to replace losses. Meal times need to be well planned to ensure that enough fuel is eaten, and that daily training practices are uninterrupted by gastrointestinal upsets. Smaller more frequent meals may assist with this.

Fluid Needs

Adequate hydration is particularly important due to the environmental conditions surfers face. These conditions include long hours in the water and exposure to high heat and humidity. In these conditions sweat losses are increased but be aware that specific losses will vary between individuals, so fluid replacement plans need to be individually tailored. Even as small as a 2% loss in body mass, and perhaps as little as a 1% loss, can have a significantly detrimental effect on performance. It is therefore critical to have water and/or sports drinks between and after sessions. Alcoholic beverages should be avoided, particularly during recovery, and caffeine intake limited during early recovery as both can have a negative effects on hydration and encourage fluid loss.

What Should I Eat Pre-Event?

Whether planning a day of surfing for practice/training, recreation or competition, the pre-event meal goals will be comparable. It is vital to top up carbohydrate stores in the body whilst preventing stomach upsets. The pre-event meal should therefore include adequate carbohydrates but be low in fat and fibre.



The recommended carbohydrate intake is 1-4g/kg one to four hours prior to an event/session which, for an average 70kg male, means 70g-280g of carbohydrates.

Examples:

- 200 - 300g of uncooked pasta
- 4 - 12 slices of bread
- 2 cups of cereal (any combination of corn, rice and/or wheat) with 1 cup of low fat milk plus 2 slices toast with jam and a glass of juice

Early morning events/sessions are common for surfers, and a smaller meal might be needed at this time to avoid gastrointestinal upsets. In such cases, a banana and muesli bar or toast/English muffin with honey and a sports drink would be good choices. It's important to practice fuelling and fluid strategies during training, so that by the time the big day arrives, the surfer is comfortable with his/her eating plan to avoid gut problems.

Carbohydrate loading may also be a good idea if a single surf session looks like lasting more than 90 minutes, as the combination of long periods of paddling and short bursts of energy when catching a wave will challenge the body's carbohydrate stores. So, by increasing these stores prior to the longer session, the body will be better placed to cope with the energy demands of surfing. However, because heats tend to be less than 30 minutes, carbohydrate loading will not have any extra benefits, as there are long enough breaks between heats to top up any depleted stores. In this case, nutritional planning is more important during/between heats (see below).

During training and in the days leading up to an event, it is important to remain hydrated. One hour prior to a surf session, a sports drink may assist in ensuring adequate hydration is achieved as well as providing small amounts of carbohydrates for energy and to top up any depleted glycogen stores. This is just as important for recreational surfers as it is at an elite level.

What Should I Eat/Drink During Competition?

A major issue during a competition or surf session is the availability of appropriate foods. So, come prepared with adequate, appropriate snacks and meals, especially when at a beach environment for an entire day. Obviously eating whilst out on the water is impractical, thus it is important to have food available when coming in from the surf for a rest or between heats in a competition.

- **60 – 90 minutes between heats:** a high GI snack such as a white bread honey sandwich would be advised to speed up glycogen restoration without causing gut upsets.
- **More than 90 minutes between heats:** a more substantial high carbohydrate meal can be consumed to replace stores, such as pasta/rice/noodle dishes or a low GI sandwich or roll. (These are slightly lower GI foods which will assist in preventing hunger and providing an ongoing source of energy throughout exercise).

Snacks including fresh and dried fruits, muesli bars, dry biscuits, home made muffins, low fat yoghurt, sports drinks, sandwiches and sports bars are easily accessible and able to be kept close at hand on the beach for refuelling in between heats or breaks in a training session. It may be useful to take a small esky with ice or cooler pack with a frozen drink to keep perishable foods fresh and ready to consume.

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Where possible, sports drinks or other fluids should be consumed during sessions/events in rest periods. Sports drinks are ideal due to their sodium content, which assists in the replacement of sodium lost via sweat, and also enhances thirst, encouraging surfers to drink more. Sodium loss is further increased due to exercising in the surf environment which is typically hot and windy.

What About Recovery?

Recovery should begin immediately following an event or training session to prepare the body following training sessions or events for optimal performance and injury prevention.

Rehydration

Surfers need to replace **150% of fluids lost**. This can be determined by the difference between an individual's weight before and after an event/session.

E.g. If pre-event weight is 75kg and post-event weight is 73kg, 2L of fluid have been lost, therefore 3 litres of fluids are required for adequate rehydration. This is particularly important during competition as surfers often compete in a number of heats per day.

Both the sodium and carbohydrates in sports drinks are beneficial for rehydration, and the carbohydrates assist to replace depleted energy stores.

After a day of surfing, a high carbohydrate meal that is low in fat and moderate protein is required to replace depleted energy stores and help repair muscle and other tissues. 1g/kg carbohydrate within 30 minutes post-exercise is recommended, especially if the next meal is more than 1 hour away.

Suitable post-exercise snacks for surfers include:

- Low fat banana smoothie
- Muesli/cereal or muesli bar + a low fat milk product
- Low fat yoghurts
- Home made muffins + a large handful of mixed nuts
- Sandwich made with white bread (high GI) with spreads such as honey or jam, or meat and low fat cheese
- Crackers with similar spreads and toppings
- Fresh or dried fruits + a low fat smoothie or yoghurt
- Fruit juices + some mixed nuts

Recovery techniques are particularly important if a competition is over consecutive days to ensure the body is ready for the physical requirements the following day.

How to get involved

Structured surf lessons are available through a registered surf school. Further information can be found online at: www.surfingaustralia.com

www.survingvictoria.com.au

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