



FACT SHEET

FOOD FOR YOUR SPORT - CANOE/KAYAK

ABOUT SPRINT CANOE/KAYAK

Sprint canoe and kayak is an Olympic sport performed over 200m, 500m or 1000m distances, in individual as well as team boats of two or four. Both canoes and kayaks are raced at the Olympic Games, although currently only men race canoes at the Olympic level. At the Olympics, women race over 200m and 500m in kayak and men race over 200m and 1000m in Kayak and Canoe. At World Championships men and women race over 200, 500 and 1000m. Kayak athletes sit facing forward in the boat and use a double bladed paddle while canoeists kneel on one knee and use a single bladed paddle. All distances (200m, 500m and 1000m) are fast paced, high intensity events with the 200m event currently raced in less than 30 seconds. Australia has achieved several medals at the Olympic level and continues to perform well internationally, particularly in the kayak events.

Elite sprint canoe and kayak athletes typically train 2-3 times per day, 6 days per week. Training usually involves a combination of on-water, resistance training and cross-training sessions. On-water sessions may include endurance or aerobic training as well as near maximal or race-pace efforts. Both individual and team boat training will be incorporated.

Races last for approximately 30 seconds to two minutes so anaerobic demands are high in racing. Athletes will often have heats, semi-finals and finals for each race they compete in and regattas are usually held over 2-3 days. Sprint athletes will often also compete in long distance outrigger events and surf-lifesaving in the off-season or as part of their training. While sprint canoe and kayak is an anaerobic sport, a high level of aerobic training is required.

TRAINING DIET

The training diet for a paddler is focused on fuelling for training and recovering appropriately prior to the next training session. Energy requirements tend to be high due to the need to maintain a high level of muscularity and the volume and frequency of training. However, it is often difficult to juggle the energy needs around a busy training, work or study schedule.

The diet should comprise of mostly good quality carbohydrates, with lean protein, low fat dairy and plenty of fruits and vegetables. Ensuring adequate and appropriate nutrition around training sessions is critical for recovery. Eating a carbohydrate and protein containing meal or snack after training can help to optimise gains in muscle mass and allow for muscular adaptation to training whilst replenishing glycogen stores for the next training session.

Some snack suggestions include:

- Bowl of cereal with low fat milk and a banana
- Muesli or nut bar with dried fruit
- Smoothie, flavoured milk or meal replacement drink
- Tub of yoghurt with fruit salad
- Sandwich or roll with meat/chicken/fish/cheese or peanut butter
- Creamed rice and a piece of fruit
- Tub of yoghurt or glass of milk and a piece of toast
- A few wholegrain crackers and a can of tuna
- Toast with peanut butter or cheese
- Handful of dried fruit and nuts

FLUID NEEDS

Since kayaking is a summer sport, maintaining good hydration practices is important. Water bottles should be taken in the boat for on-water training sessions and small amounts should be consumed regularly during breaks. Sports drinks may be useful as they not only provide fluid but also have the additional benefit of carbohydrate for improved fuel or mental drive. A good way to check hydration levels is to monitor urine colour and aim for a pale "straw" colour most of the day.

WHAT SHOULD I EAT BEFORE COMPETITION?

Sprint canoe/kayakers will usually have several races per day, which may be as short as 30 minutes apart or there may be many hours between events. A high carbohydrate meal 2 to 4 hours before the start of competition is a good chance for a final fuel top up before the day begins. Suitable options can include cereal, toast or crumpets with jam or honey, raisin toast, pikelets with banana, fresh or tinned fruit or spaghetti on toast. For athletes racing early in the morning, a light breakfast might be preferred e.g. toast or an English muffin with a glass of milk. Athletes who are too nervous to eat solid food, may find a liquid breakfast easier to manage e.g. a fruit smoothie or liquid meal replacement. To avoid stomach discomfort, foods low in fibre and fat may be preferred.

Fluids are also important in the 24 hours leading up to competition. Monitoring urine colour leading up to an event is a good way for athletes to ensure that they are well hydrated and urine should be pale yellow in colour on race morning. Athletes should aim to consume 300-500ml of fluid with the pre-competition meal and continue to sip on water or sports drink in the lead up to the competition.



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EATING AND DRINKING DURING COMPETITION?

Competitions usually consist of several races (heats, semi's and finals) over the day; therefore recovery snacks post-race can double as pre-event snacks for the next race. As there is often only a short amount of time between races, paddlers are advised to snack on small snacks over the day rather than large meals.

Paddlers should pack snacks rather than rely on competition venue facilities where suitable options may not be available. Some suggestions for portable snacks to eat between races include:

- Fresh or tinned fruit
- Muesli or nut bars
- Trail mix with dried fruit/nuts/seeds
- Sandwich with honey/jam/ banana
- Milk or juice 'poppers'
- Tub of low-fat yoghurt/custard
- Creamed rice tins
- Crackers or rice crackers
- Low-fat fruit muffins
- English muffins/crumpets with jam/honey

RECOVERY

Recovery after training and competition can be accelerated by consuming a meal or snack containing carbohydrate to replace muscle glycogen stores; protein to speed up muscle repair and fluid to replace sweat losses. Ideally a recovery meal or snack should be consumed within 30-60 minutes of finishing training or competition.

As paddlers can have an intense training schedule with multiple sessions per day or compete in events over several days, meals and snacks careful selection of post-exercise meals and snacks is important. Recovery meals and snacks should contain carbohydrate and protein as well fluids such as water and sports drinks.

OTHER NUTRITION TIPS

There is a trend towards leanness in canoe / kayak paddlers however leanness does not always equal good results. Sometimes focussing on reducing body fat levels results in poor training or poor recovery from training, as the high energy demands of training are unable to be met. Often muscular strength and power are more critical than low body fat levels so paddlers are encouraged to focus on fuelling their training effectively, and allow their body composition to alter more naturally as a result of quality training. If body fat levels remain a concern, please see an Accredited Sports Dietitian.

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