

FACT SHEET

FOOD FOR YOUR SPORT – MOTOCROSS

ABOUT MOTOCROSS

Motocross is one of many motorcycle sports, and is held on off-road circuits. The sport originated in the UK in the 1920's and was initially known as "scrambles racing"- off road events held across difficult terrain. It has since spread throughout the world to be an international sport.

Growing popularity in the sport has also brought about refinement of bikes and the development of sub disciplines of motocross including supercross and arenacross (held at indoor arenas), freestyle motocross (focused on jumping and aerial skills), supermoto (races held on and off road), and vintage motocross (bikes that were made before 1975).

Motocross riders must have a high level of cardiovascular fitness as they need to be able to control a heavy motorbike while maintaining high speeds during a race. In addition riders must also have quick reflexes, and be able to deal with inertia and gravitational forces, making balance and strength important requirements for the sport. Weight training is an important part of preparation, incorporating core strength and all other muscle groups for strength on the bike.

Riders have to wear riding safety gear to protect them against injuries. This gear can be heavy, uncomfortable and very hot. Upper body clothing consists of a single layer of a light weight top, plus an armour system, gloves, helmet, goggles and neck brace, whilst lower body includes two layers on the legs with knee braces and heavy boots.

The main competition run by the FIM (Federation of International Motorcycling) is the Motocross World Championship series held across a range of countries each year. There are also smaller events held nationally and locally in different countries. In Australia Motocross Nationals are held over 10 rounds from April to August

TRAINING DIET

A good training diet will help motocross riders to increase mental clarity and reflexes, sustain energy and stamina, and improve performance in training and competition.

An ideal training diet should include adequate carbohydrate to match energy needs, moderate amounts of protein and healthy fats, as well as supplying enough vitamins and minerals. Focusing on nutrient-dense foods such as wholegrains, fruit, vegetables, dairy products, lean meat, poultry and fish or vegetarian protein alternatives will help to ensure that all nutrient needs are met. Excess fat from takeaway and fast foods, as well as alcohol should be limited as this will impair training adaptations and can make it more difficult to reach body composition goals.

Motocross riders often have busy training schedules with multiple sessions throughout the week. Therefore they need be planned with food choices and ensure that the timing of meals and snacks meals coincides with their training schedule to optimise fuelling and recovery between sessions. On heavy training days, extra snacks are needed to fuel higher training loads in contrast to lighter/rest days where less food may be sufficient.

FLUID NEEDS

Fluid needs can be high because of the high sweat rate that occurs due to the amount of protective gear that is worn. In humid conditions sweat evaporates slower and so more fluid is needed. Keeping track of individual fluid losses is important to avoid overheating and dehydration. High fluid losses can negatively affect both physical and mental performance, as the body is less able to cool itself.

Individual fluid needs will vary between riders depending on their unique sweat rate. Training is a good time to trial and refine hydration habits and monitor changes in fluid losses under different conditions.

Most of the time, water is sufficient to replace fluid needs. However, during long or hot training sessions, as well as in competition, sports drinks can be useful to provide fuel as well as fluid and electrolytes simultaneously.

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EATING BEFORE COMPETITION

Food available at race venues often consists of a typical takeaway menu (hamburgers, hot dogs, pies, chips etc.). These high-fat, energy-dense and nutrient poor options are not ideal for competition fuelling or recovery so it is important to plan ahead.

The timing of the pre-competition meal will depend on the start time of the race. Riders may also struggle with gut discomfort due to gravitational forces that occur during racing. However, aiming to eat a meal 2-4 hours prior to competing will allow sufficient time for the food to digest and stomach to empty and reduce the risk of gut issues.

Suitable pre-event meal options include:

- Cereal with milk and fruit
- Baked beans on toast
- Sandwiches/rolls with light fillings
- Small serve of rice or pasta dish

Riders who struggle to eat before competition because of pre-race nerves or poor appetite may prefer to try lighter options such as:

- Fruit based smoothie
- Muesli bar with piece of fruit
- Toast with peanut butter
- Yoghurt with fruit salad

Is important to start a race well hydrated. Monitoring the color of your urine can be a good self-assessment tool, which should be a clear, pale yellow colour. If it is very dark, the athlete should drink extra water to rehydrate.

EATING AND DRINKING DURING COMPETITION

Riders should take advantage of breaks in racing to top up fuel stores with carbohydrate-rich, low fat foods and fluids. Water and sports drinks are better options than soft drinks and caffeinated energy drinks for hydration and fuelling. Hydration backpacks may help fluid intake during racing.

Food available at the track is often inappropriate to meet sports nutrition goals so it is wise to pack suitable snacks rather than rely on poor quality canteen options.

It's a good idea to take a small esky or freezer bag with ice-blocks to keep food cool at the venue over the day. Snacks to help refuel during breaks in competition include:

- Fruit
- Dried fruit & nut mix
- Yoghurt pouches
- Soup
- Simple sandwiches (e.g. honey & banana)
- Hot chocolate

RECOVERY

There are three main goals of recovery nutrition:

- Refuel muscle glycogen (carbohydrate stores)
- Repair muscle (for function & development)
- Rehydrate (replace fluids lost through sweat)

Recovery meals and snacks should contain carbohydrate (fuel), some protein (for muscle repair and development) and plenty of fluids and electrolytes to replace sweat losses. A recovery meal or snack should be consumed soon after training or competition, particularly if the next training session or event is the next day. Fluids (mainly water) should also be drunk to rehydrate and restore fluid levels.

Some recovery food suggestions include:

- Ham, cheese and salad sandwich
- Flavoured milk tetra pack + nut bar
- Homemade beef burgers with salad and cheese
- Poached eggs and avocado on toast

OTHER NUTRITION TIPS

- **Caffeine** Some riders consume caffeine in the form of cola drinks, tea, coffee or energy drinks to help prevent fatigue, especially when they feel their "energy levels are low". Working with an Accredited Sports Dietitian will help to determine the lowest effective dose and the safe and suitable types of caffeine to minimise risk of side effects
- **Travel** If travelling extensively for racing, a basic multivitamin supplement may help to top up micronutrient needs if food supply is unpredictable