

## FACT SHEET

# FOOD FOR YOUR SPORT – OBSTACLE COURSE RACING

## ABOUT OBSTACLE COURSE RACING

Obstacle course racing popularity has grown significantly throughout the past decade. Traditionally used as a means of preparing members of the military for the physical and mental challenges of battle, the history of obstacle course racing dates back to ancient Greek times. Now, thousands of 'weekend warriors' and professional racers alike take part in these events each year and it is purported to be one of the fastest growing new sports in the world. Obstacle races are based on a medium to long distance running course with obstacles at various intervals along the route (e.g. rope walls, sand bag carries, under/over logs and wading through mud).

Races range from entry-level, social events done over a 5km course to elite level courses requiring the participants to race over half and full marathon distances, and at times for upwards of 24 hours, completing grueling feats such as ice water swimming, jumping from heights and undertaking high ropes courses.

The physiological considerations of the obstacle racing sport when planning training nutritional intake leading into an event will differ depending on the length of the event. Obstacle course events require physical endurance interspersed with short bursts of high intensity effort, working across multiple energy systems. This sport requires a good base level fitness for middle to long distance running, strength and power to complete.

For entry-level races, the events will last for 45-60 minutes and training leading up to the event might include middle distance running and building general strength, particularly upper body strength.

When moving into the advanced and professional racing, a greater level of physical endurance, strength, agility and stamina are required. At this stage, races typically extend past 2 hours in duration and, for professionals, body composition can play a role in performance, with optimal power to weight ratio becoming advantageous for moving around more complex courses.

## TRAINING DIET

Training nutrition will differ for an entry-level participant compared to an elite level athlete, whose training is likely to be more frequent and of greater intensity.

For an entry-level participant, training nutrition should be based on nutrient rich carbohydrates, quality lean proteins spaced at regular intervals across the day and healthy fats such as oily fish, nuts, seeds and avocado. These foods, coupled with 5 or more serves of colorful vegetables and 2 serves of fruit will provide fibre, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals - all of the nutrients required for an optimal diet.

For elite athletes, a similar plan to the guidelines outlined above will provide adequate nutrition for training, however, a greater emphasis on total energy intake to meet training load will need to be planned.

Where body composition adjustment may lead to improvements in racing performance, extra care should be taken in planning energy carbohydrate around training. Any attempts to reduce body fat should be planned over a long period, working with a small energy deficit to allow for the required changes in body composition, while reducing impact to training quality as much as possible.

## FLUID NEEDS

The aim is to start any exercise session or competition well hydrated. This requires drinking regularly throughout the day leading up to training or competition. Having a drink with all meals and snacks is a good start

Fluid requirements during competition will depend on the length of the event being undertaken. For races lasting less than 60 minutes, water should be the fluid of choice.

Where races are longer than >90 minutes, electrolyte and carbohydrate-containing drinks can be used to replenish energy levels and electrolytes lost through sweat. There is a high variability between individual for fluid needs, and this should be assessed ahead of racing, taking into account weather conditions.

An Accredited Sports Dietitian can determine individual sweat losses and develop a personal hydration plan.

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### EATING BEFORE COMPETITION

A carbohydrate rich meal in the 2-3 hours before an event will ensure that the body's fuel (glycogen) stores are topped up ahead of the race. Suitable options include foods such as cereal with milk, porridge, baked beans or toast with jam or nut butter. Liquid breakfast tetra packs, fruit smoothies or fruit with yoghurt may sit better than a larger full breakfast for some.

It is important not to try any foods or fluids that haven't been practiced in training before the race. Carbohydrate tolerance will vary between individuals and should be planned out in the weeks leading into the event.

Optimal hydration should be achieved before the race begins, and should be planned in the days leading into the race, so as to avoid drinking large volumes of water before commencing as this can lead to stomach discomfort and excessive need to urinate during the event. Aim for an extra 400-600ml of fluids prior to racing with breakfast, followed by sips to thirst coming into the start.

### EATING AND DRINKING DURING COMPETITION

For the shorter events (less than ~60 minutes), as long as pre-race fueling and hydration levels are adequate, there is no need for any additional food intake during the event. Water may be provided and sipped on during the shorter and more social events as desired.

For elite and professional events, nutrition should be planned and trialed in advance. Longer courses will provide hydration and food stations at regular intervals throughout the track and include electrolyte drinks, gels, sports bars and carbohydrate-rich snacks. Food choices should be carbohydrate-based, with the aim of taking in approximately 30-60 g per hour of carbohydrate.

Practically, it may be difficult to carry snacks with the athlete on the course, especially when water and mud obstacles are commonplace. Hydration backpacks and fluid/fuel belts may be useful for carrying extra hydration during the race, as well as small nutrition support items such as gels and gummies.

Snacks should be properly sealed and an alternative fuel option should be prearranged in the case that the obstacles damage food.

### RECOVERY

Recovery nutrition needs to consider 3 parts:

- 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.

Your recovery nutrition should start as soon as possible post-training or race, to maximise training adaptations, enhance muscle repair, replenish muscle glycogen and commence rehydration. Depending on the finishing time of the event or training session, a recovery snack containing carbohydrates and protein may be consumed first, followed by a full meal to continue the recovery process.

Fluids should also be consumed, based on estimated losses to rehydrate and replace sweat losses.

Some recovery food suggestions include:

- Chicken, avocado and salad sandwich
- Dairy-based fruit smoothie
- Yoghurt + muesli with nuts and seeds
- Burritos with beef, cheese, avocado and salad
- Dried fruit & nut mix + flavoured milk tetra

### OTHER NUTRITION TIPS

- **Research the event** Be sure to know what nutrition support is offered at your event in advance to assist in planning intake during longer events.
- **Alcohol** Often alcohol is offered at the end of obstacle course events. After exercise, alcohol can impair the recovery process and should be avoided. It can also exacerbate injuries so is best to avoid drinking alcohol if any injuries occur during the event to avoid delaying return to full training.