

FACT SHEET

FOOD FOR YOUR SPORT – SAILING

ABOUT SAILING

Sailing relies on harnessing both physical and mental prowess to move a boat through water using the power of wind. Competitive sailing requires participants to have good fitness and agility, as well as being tactically and mechanically aware. Off-shore sailing uses boats that are crewed by up to 17 people and involves legs lasting from a few days to several weeks duration. Sailing also involves “off the beach” racing (e.g. Olympic class sailing) in boats crewed by 1 to 3 people.

The length of sailing races varies from hours, days, and months at a time (for long-distance events). Competition occurs as a series of races (each lasting between 30-90 minutes) called a regatta and will usually extend over more than one day. Over recent years there has been a trend towards smaller and lighter craft in Olympic sailing classes, placing increasing demands on both the athletic and technical capacities of the sailors.

The physical demands of sailing vary according to boat class, crew position and weather conditions. The ‘ideal body type’ for sailing is complex and will vary based on these factors. Height and crew weights (combined body weight for all sailors on the boat) for some types of boats are an important factor. Generally lower bodyweight levels can be advantageous in light winds in smaller vessels. Strong wind conditions can usually benefit from increasing the lean mass and body weight of sailors.

Training for elite Olympic Class sailors usually involves two training sessions per day. Sessions include on land training (strength, flexibility, fitness, conditioning), and on-water sessions (tactical, skill, conditioning sessions). This can equate to 30-50 hours per week. For club level athletes, total training will equate to about 9 to 10 hours per week.

Offshore training days can be up to 8 hours per day and involve undertaking active training and boat ‘work’ activities. High-intensity gym training sessions (approx. 1hr) and 3 hours of active sailing per day are typical.

TRAINING DIET

The training diet for a sailor should be tailored to suit the varying daily training requirements and individual body composition needs. Sufficient carbohydrate intake to balance daily fuel needs, and quality protein choices (lean meat, poultry, seafood, dairy, legumes) at each meal to ensure muscle regeneration and repair, will create a good base. A variety of fruit and vegetables should be eaten daily to ensure anti-oxidant and vitamin requirements (unlocking the energy potential in foods) are met.

Given a sailor will likely spend hours on the water during a training session, planning ahead and ensuring carbohydrate fueling options and adequate fluids are packed for during the session is crucial. Suitable carbohydrate options include: cereal bars and fruit or sports foods like carbohydrate gels. Suitable fluids can include a sports drink (which will help to meet the sailors carbohydrate and fluid needs) or water.

A focus on recovery nutrition will be important, especially for sailors that are undertaking two training sessions a day, or several sessions per week (see recovery section below).

FLUID NEEDS

Although surrounded by water, the risk of a sailor becoming dehydrated in training or a regatta is high unless a planned approach to hydration is used. Fluid balance testing with Olympic Sailors has shown sweat rates that average between 500-1500ml/hour. It is recommended that sailors weigh themselves before and after a training session so that estimates of their own fluid needs can be gauged.

Dehydration causes cognitive impairment along with reduced skill and impaired endurance, which is a significant issue for sailors given decision making and concentration are key factors in performance.

Sailors should aim to start training sessions and regattas in a hydrated state. Drinking small amounts of fluid regularly throughout the day can assist this. Checking the colour and amount of urine produced from day to day will help the sailor assess their hydration status.

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Planning ahead and taking sufficient fluid on the boat or in the coach boat for on-water sessions and regattas is important. Suitable choices include: sports drink (to provide carbohydrate and electrolytes as well as fluid), water or electrolyte drinks (when fuel requirements are low but fluid needs are high). Training sessions should allow for regular drink breaks, and hydration should be a priority between races in a regatta.

Re-hydrating after training sessions and after race days will require attention to ensuring the correct volume of fluid is consumed, along with some sodium (in foods or the fluid). Drinking with meals and snacks will help.

EATING BEFORE COMPETITION

The meal before a regatta should be eaten approximately 2-3 hours before heading onto the water. It is important that a sailor trials different options in training to see what works best, however a focus on a meal or snack that contains carbohydrate food with some protein is ideal. Ideas include a sandwich (with lean meat/chicken and salad) and a piece of fruit, or pasta with chicken or beef, or (if a liquid option is preferred) a fruit smoothie. A top up snack such as a cereal bar, fruit or nuts may be needed while sailing out to the race start.

A sailor should start the regatta hydrated by drinking small amounts regularly from waking on race day, till the racing has begun. Drinking additional fluid (e.g. 300-500ml) with breakfast and the pre-race meal will help to ensure fluid needs are met.

EATING AND DRINKING DURING COMPETITION

Offshore Sailing Events

During offshore sailing events the length of the event and weight of supplies are important to consider, as are the nutritional content of the supplies taken on board. Food supplies need to provide carbohydrate, protein, fluids, as well as total energy intake (which can be greater than 15MJ/day) and must also be of high nutritional quality (e.g. with iron, calcium, vitamin C, omega-3 fats, etc) especially if the event is held over several days. Some examples of foods that are low-weight nutritious options:

- Specially formulated dehydrated meals
- Flavoured rice/pasta side dishes
- Snack packs of dried fruit

- Dried biscuits, crackers or rice cakes
- Foil sachets of tuna or salmon
- Long-life cheese (e.g. cheese-sticks)
- Long-life (UHT) milk
- Powdered liquid meal supplements
- Powdered sports drinks

Other Types of Sailing

Planning ahead to ensure carbohydrate and hydration needs can be met between races is critical to maintaining performance throughout each regatta. Depending on the crew members role, aiming for between 30-60g of carbohydrate per hour on-water while in race mode is a good guide. Suitable, easily digested options include cereal bars, fruit, and sports foods such as carbohydrate gels and sports drink. Packing sufficient fluid on the boat or coach boat to use between each race will be required to help replace sweat losses and prepare for the next race. Ensuring all food and fluid is secured to the boat is important so it doesn't end up overboard during rough weather or capsizes.

RECOVERY

For multi-stage offshore sailing events, the recovery period can be a stopover. This opportunity can be used to eat larger portions of carbohydrate- and protein-containing meals, such as pasta with bolognese sauce, meat with bread, potatoes and vegetables, or a chicken and rice dish.

Both offshore events and other sailing events and training sessions require that the recovery nutrition process is started either while sailing back to shore, or while de-rigging the boat on the dock or shoreline. Therefore portable recovery options is important. Ideas include yoghurt pouches, flavoured milk tetras, liquid meal drinks or a sandwiches with a lean meat/chicken/cheese. The re-hydration process should also start at this time.

OTHER NUTRITION TIPS

- **Emergency Rations** Unpredictable weather conditions can extend event times. Ensure that emergency rations are considered as a back up.
- **Motion sickness** Good hydration strategies and appropriate use of medically prescribed medications can help to manage this problem.