Race week and race-morning eating

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Eat normally for most of race week. For events longer than about 90 minutes, make carbohydrate the main part of every meal for the last two days. On race morning, eat a familiar, carbohydrate-rich breakfast 1 to 4 hours before the start, and fuel during the race the way you practiced.

Why it matters: Full carbohydrate stores delay fatigue in long events, and carbohydrate during the race improves performance (see "Fueling for endurance events"). Trying something new on race day is one of the easiest ways to upset your stomach.

Do you need to carb load?

Your event	Last two days	Race morning	During
Under about 60 minutes (5K, 10K, sprint triathlon for many)	Eat normally	Familiar breakfast	Water if you want it
About 60 to 90 minutes	Eat normally, with plenty of carbohydrate	Carbohydrate-rich breakfast	A sports drink or gel can help
Over about 90 minutes (half marathon for many, marathon, century ride)	Carbohydrate loading	Carbohydrate-rich breakfast	30 to 60 grams of carbohydrate an hour, more for very long events

How much carbohydrate to load?

The sports nutrition guidelines suggest about 4.5 to 5.5 grams of carbohydrate per pound of body weight a day (10 to 12 grams per kilogram) for the last 36 to 48 hours (see "Fueling for endurance events").

Body weight	Grams of carbohydrate a day
120 lb (54 kg)	About 540 to 650
150 lb (68 kg)	About 680 to 820
180 lb (82 kg)	About 820 to 980
210 lb (95 kg)	About 950 to 1,140

That's more than most people expect. Getting close is fine; drinks, juice and simple starches make it easier.

A sample loading day (about 670 grams)

Meal	Food	Carbohydrate (approx.)
Breakfast	2 cups cooked oatmeal with a banana and 2 tbsp honey; 12 oz orange juice	160 g
Snack	1 large bagel with jam	75 g
Lunch	2 cups cooked white rice, chicken, a small salad; 20 oz sports drink	125 g
Snack	2 oz pretzels; ¼ cup raisins	75 g
Dinner	3 cups cooked pasta with tomato sauce and a little lean meat; 2 slices white bread	160 g
Evening	12 oz sports drink or juice; a cup of low-fat yogurt with fruit	70 g

Carbohydrate values are approximate; check labels for the foods you use.

Tips for loading days

- **Choose lower-fiber foods:** white rice, pasta, bread, potatoes without skin, juice. Too much fiber can upset your stomach on race day.
- **Keep fat and portions of protein moderate** so there's room for carbohydrate.
- **Expect to gain a couple of pounds.** Stored carbohydrate holds water. That's normal.

- **Skip alcohol** the night before.
- **Eat familiar foods.** Test your loading menu before a long training run.

Race morning

Time before start	What to eat
3 to 4 hours	A full breakfast: bagel or toast with jam or honey, a banana, juice, or oatmeal
1 to 2 hours	A smaller snack: a banana, a slice of toast with honey, or a sports bar
Less than an hour	A gel or a few sips of sports drink, if you're used to it

- **Drink to thirst** before the start; you don't need to load up on water (see "Hydration, sodium and race day").
- **Caffeine:** if you normally have coffee, have your usual amount.

During the race

- **Start fueling early** in long events, in the first 30 to 45 minutes.
- **Spread it out:** small amounts every 20 to 30 minutes.
- **Use what you practiced,** and know what the race provides at aid stations.

After the race

- Eat a meal or snack with carbohydrate and protein within a few hours.
- Drink normally. Don't force large amounts of water.

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