



Training with Real Foods?

I am often asked about sports drinks versus natural foods and rather than get into a debate about what one should use in training and racing I thought I would share some ideas about incorporating real foods into your training regime. Contrary to what some of the sports drinks manufacturers might advertise, you will not keel over into a malnourished, pitiful triathlete if you forego all or some of the drinks, gels and bars – having completed the Ironman (and many sub-five half-ironmans) last year *sans* sports drinks I am living proof of this!

SO WHAT CAN I USE?



It's really VERY personal but I find **fruit** to be fantastic on long rides. You can easily pack it in plastic baggies (although the only downside is that calorie for calorie it is a lot more bulky than your average bar/gel) and place it in a Bento box for easy eating access or in your back pockets. It is hydrating, packed with minerals and vitamins (anti-oxidants) and makes all of your bike-buddies jealous since it is real, juicy and delicious! ☺

Muffins, bagels, sandwiches – any carbohydrates like these can be used although they are best on longer rides at an easier pace – or where you have a little time to digest (during a stop at the Runcible Spoon for example). You do have to take extra water for some of these “dry” foods and may need to practice eating and riding but usually with a little practice you can eat these without a problem. I do find how hungry you are is a factor – for example, when I *need* food I can eat a muffin or bagel and immediately after run a 7 minute mile without a problem, however if I'm eating because I THINK I'm supposed to eat – rather than real hunger – I find it “sits” in my stomach and causes an issue.

Orange Juice, Carrot Juice, Green juices (spinach, lettuce, parsley etc.) – this is a little bit of an art getting the right mixture but orange and carrot juices have quite a high sugar content so I usually like to “water them down” with either a green juice like lettuce (higher water content than parsley, kale or any darker green) or just adding straight water. I did all of my long rides last year with fresh juices and even raced with a Camelbak filled with the goods – scrumptious! It is a lot of work but the greens give a very stabilizing effect on the blood sugar – I would be careful and make sure to experiment with your body if you are just using orange and carrot. The other suggestion I would make is to try and freeze the drink if it is going to be a hot day – before races I would always freeze my Camelbak....partially to conserve the nutrients but also because warm spinach juice is not the most appetizing (...not that warm Gatorade is much better!). On rides I would sometimes juice the night before and freeze the bike bottle.



Water from Soaked Fruits, lemon juice, lime: If you have a hard time taking straight water on rides you can add some lemon or lime juice to the water – it's especially refreshing. Also for a sweeter taste you can soak dates (or figs/any other dried fruits) in water overnight and the nutrients and sweetness from the dates will be present in the soaked water....which can then be used on a ride.



Overall I really encourage you to at least **try** and use natural foods when training and/or racing – it can work really well, be less expensive and, in my opinion, offer far superior recovery times than sports drink (again, just my experience, but when I pump my body with chemical filled drinks it feels very unnatural and I feel my body needs to “process” all of the chemicals...before it starts to process the lactic acid). However everyone is SO different and I encourage you to try: experiment and see what works **for you**.

Some foods to **use with caution** (but again, you might be fine) would be:

- **High fat foods** (although I do know athletes who can take in peanut butter and love it!) – it tends to slow digestion and cause GI upset. The other side of this however is that if you can stomach higher fat foods then for a really long ride it might be a good option early in the ride since it might help you six hours into the ride.
- **Dried fruit.** Yes, Dave Scott did race with figs back in the early Ironman days...but anything dried is going to require extra fluids so I think you are better off with the water already in the fruit (i.e. the normal, non-dried version)!
- **High protein** – carbohydrates are our preferred fuel source when exercising so typically they work best whether as drinks, fruits, bread-type products
- **Anything strong tasting/heavy** – simple food means easy simple digestion. That double chocolate extra fudge brownie might sound fantastic....but, well, best to choose cautiously at high heartrates!
- **Texture** – pretty obvious but practical things to think about would be whether it will melt in the sun, be tasty when warm, have a gooey texture and so on.



Most of all just play! I'd love to hear how it goes so feel free to email me any great foods you find in your experimentation!

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