

Race-day preparation can involve some seriously early breakfasts – but is it absolutely necessary?



TO EAT OR NOT TO EAT – EARLY-BIRD BREAKFASTING

Q I have a 70.3 coming up and it's a 6:30am start. I know it's preferable to eat two to three hours before racing, but I can't face a 3:30am get-up! **HUGH LACEY, EMAIL**

THE COACH

MARK KLEANTHOUS

is a triathlon coach who has completed 38 Ironman events



A My advice is to stay away from doing anything on race day that you haven't practised in training. So, with this in mind, it's probably not a good idea to change your eating patterns on race morning, even if it is optimal to eat three hours before the race start.

Reducing your training and consuming 10% more calories from carbohydrates during the final three days will be sufficient to make sure you've stored as much as possible for your 70.3. Your three-day taper nutrition strategy should be to snack more often, rather than increase portion size.

Practise having a liquid replacement meal 60-90mins before a race simulation effort, and consume little and often every hour (up to 60g of carbohydrate during the bike and run).

Start consuming a carbohydrate drink or gel after 10mins of cycling,

and keep yourself topped up. Aiming for 60g of carbohydrate (240kcal) per hour will allow you to perform to the best of your ability, as this is at the upper level of what most people can absorb.

The majority of athletes cannot face a large breakfast two to three hours before their event on race morning, so I'd recommend eating more solids on the bike instead. Athletes I know and work with who don't have a large breakfast several hours before the start don't experience a drop in performance if they adapt the above. However, it's perhaps more important for these athletes to really concentrate on smoother race-day pacing by going easy on the hills and avoiding coasting downhill.

Like equipment, nutrition is not something you can buy off the shelf the week before your race; it has to be practised with many times in training, in similar conditions and at race-pace efforts. So in summary, trying something new for the first time in a race is a risk not worth taking, whether it's highly recommended or not!

THE ATHLETE

EMMA-KATE LIBBURY

is a professional triathlete who races Ironman



A Welcome to the world of triathlon! Unfortunately for night owls, one of the perils of our sport is the early race start times. It's important to eat something before you race, even if the thought of a 3:30am wake-up call is unappealing. You don't have to eat three hours before the race - two hours should be plenty of time, so if you can handle getting up at 4:30am then this might solve your problem. Try to minimise anything that needs to be done on race morning by preparing your kit and breakfast the night before, so you can just slip out of bed when your alarm goes off and start eating soon after.

Remember, you don't need to eat a lot on race morning. If you've eaten well in the week preceding the race and tapered well, then your glycogen stores will already be topped up and you just need a

simple breakfast. You will also find it gets easier to get up and eat at these early hours the more accustomed to racing you become. I used to struggle but now I'm a master at eating porridge at 3:30am. It's all part of the race-day experience!

I know plenty of professional triathletes who dislike rising early to eat breakfast on race day. Some set their alarms for three hours pre-race and go back to bed once they've eaten. Others eat something light 90mins to two hours before the race. Whatever you decide to do, make sure you've practised it pre-race on a key training day.

While the early alarm really isn't that appealing to some, you'll find that it is important for more than just getting your breakfast down. For optimal performance, you want your body and mind to be awake and mobilised well in advance of your race start. You may not be a natural early bird but try to come to terms with the early start and view it as an integral part of race-day preparation.

“If you've eaten well in the week preceding the race then you'll just need a simple breakfast on race day”