



Username

••••••••

LOGIN

Register | Forgot Login?

articles

news

events

reviews

blogs

world info

photos

videos

training

competitions

shop

Check out our stores



search planetFear.com

myplanetFear
click here to customise your homepage

planetFear / Latest articles / Optimising Race Nutrition

Optimising Race Nutrition

Article by Anna McCormack

Monday 7th September 2009

Eating enough food and being properly hydrated is vital to performing well in adventure races. To do this it is important to be well organised. You need to be able to access the food you want at any given time and do it fast. If you are not organised, it is very easy to lose seconds or minutes each time you try and access food. Even worse, you may decide it is too much effort to get the food and if this is the case, you will doubtless suffer really badly as a result and lose massive amounts of time (I have suffered like this and it is worth spending longer thinking and organising food to avoid this). It may sometimes seem excessive going through everything so thoroughly before a race but it is worth it. It will make your race faster and more enjoyable.

I will discuss multi-day non-stop races without a support crew in most detail as these take most organisation. However, the same principles apply to shorter and stage races even if the degree of organisation is not as crucial. That being said, the time separating teams in shorter races is often closer, so saving seconds instead of minutes becomes more important.



Pasi Ikonen sorting through his gear pre race. Note that not only food but also clothing has to be packed into easily identifiable waterproof bags for each section.

Optimising Your Food Whilst In Transition

Different teams organise things slightly differently. In general, most team members like their own kit box for all their clothes and food. However, some teams like to have one box for food, one for clothes, etc. A compromise might be for each member to have their individual box and to have a stove and food that needs cooking in a fifth box. It is a matter of both personal preference and how many boxes (and the size of boxes) race organisers allow. Expect to spend as many hours organising your race kit as you spend on the race itself. It is no mean feat but its importance should never be underestimated!

It may seem obvious, but during transitions you are not making any progress on the course. In other words, any time spent in transitions not doing a specific activity (e.g. eating or sleeping) is wasted time. Therefore it is vital that food is well organised. A transition is not the time to be organising food. The best method is to have organised food before the race into 12/24 hours worth of 'energy' bags for the long races (smaller bags for shorter races) so that you can pick a bag with sufficient calories for the next section. The bags need to have a variety of sweet and salty foods. Don't rely on Powerbars and gels since you will soon get sick of them and crave fatty foods like babybells and salty foods like Bombay mix. Keep a few 'add to' items available since you can dip into these and add them to the 12 hour bags to satisfy specific cravings for the following section.

Approaching Transitions

This is an important time. It is a time to think about what needs to be done in transitions before the hectic activity comes. You need to think about what you would like to eat and drink, where the food or drink is to be found within your / the team's box, whether or not you will need spoons, tin openers or to get a stove going – and if so, who's responsibility it is going to be. You also need to think about how long the next section is, which activity it will be and therefore how many bags of food are necessary and what type of food is most suitable. You also need to think about how much water is likely to be available during the next stage and how much drink needs to be carried. It is a lot easier to eat 'heavy foods' before a canoeing stage for instance, than before a trekking stage so make sure you pace your eating accordingly even if the temptation is just to eat as much as possible whilst good food is available. When trekking, it is easiest to eat food whilst moving uphill, (you risk choking if you eat whilst running downhill) so have food in your hand as you leave transition if the terrain is appropriate. Remember, you can eat on the move but you can't fix your feet,

so if you are really rushed, just grab the food to go. You will need to take all these kinds of things into account when spending the two minutes to half an hour in front of your transition box so make sure you have thought it all through ahead of time!

Action Planning For Transitions



Pete James eating tuna during transition in the Adrenalin Rush 2001

These can be a bit hectic with changing clothes and disciplines, eating food/drinking and getting food/drink for the next section all at once. It is all the more important to be organised with the food and to have thought about it before arriving. It is important to be calm and organised but to waste no time. Have an agreed system that the team follows. It is also important that you are organised when you leave a transition. You will need to access your box again so everything needs to be returned to its correct place.

Organising Transitions When Exhausted



Transition areas late in the race must be extremely well organised to save all time and effort at the point where racers will be at their most fatigued

Transition times generally become longer as races progress, since people become increasingly exhausted and start to move and think more slowly. Thinking clearly becomes very difficult and it is for this reason as much as for any other that pre race preparation- and keeping organised during a race – becomes crucial. Having a system so that everything is in a specific place means you need to think less. Just imagine searching for a particular item of food you are craving in a really messy equipment box when you are exhausted, having slept very little for six days. Exhaustion brings the added problem of making you less able to stomach a lot of varieties of food. People often lose their appetites or simply get bored of eating. Adding the spice of variety goes a long way towards combating this and stimulating jaded taste buds so make sure you have a lot of variety in your boxes – particularly in your first races in new environments – since it will take you a while to know what your body is likely to crave and what you will be able to stomach once exhausted.



A well organised transition, with a dedicated cooking area (top of the image left of the Landrover) allowing hot food and drinks to be prepared easily if required

Accessing Race Food

It is important to think about organising how best to get at race food during each discipline. Whilst trekking / running the easiest method is to keep food in pockets on the rucksack's waist belt or in mesh pockets on the side of the pack. During biking legs, these can also be used but duck-tapping energy bars to the bikes or attaching 'goodie' bags to the frames are also good options. When canoeing, the best place for food and drink is usually in pouches attached to the buoyancy aid. In longer (over 15 hour sections) this won't be enough so it is worth having an additional supply of food readily accessible either under your spray deck or on your deck. Keeping this sea / polluted water free is obviously vital so spend time thinking through these systems. Drink should be in a bladder either in your buoyancy aid or in a similar place to your spare food but with a long tube that can be reached with taking the hand off the paddles.



Detail of a hydration unit integrated into a buoyancy aid with spare pockets for energy bars and other food

Support Crews

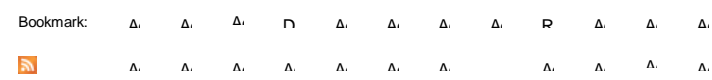
Support crews are often part of long non-stop races. They are a crucial part of the team who are working hard for long periods of time. As the race progresses they also become tired and having a system for the racers is again important. The system becomes second nature and they will need to think less. The support crew needs to organise a 'kitchen' and changing area. This is best achieved by bringing tarps to hang from the support vehicle, assigning somewhere to cook and somewhere for the racers to sit whilst eating and changing. The support team need to know what food you like/dislike and any possible cravings you may have. They also need to know if you prefer plain water or energy drink both for within transitions and for sending you back out on the course with a pre-prepared bladder or water bottle. Communication is important. The team should have all decided whether to change kit or eat first. Labelling all your food/kit will really help the support crew – especially if they are people who do not know you all well. NB: Having a support crew is no excuse for racers to be disorganised.

[Click here to read Anna McCormack's full article *Support Crewing in Adventure Racing*](#)

Summary

- *Eating enough food is vital to performing well. To do this it is important to be well organised, you need to be able to access the food you want at a particular point and do it fast. Facilitate this by organising your food into varied 'energy' bags that will last a set length of time since these are easy to grab when in fast transitions.*
- *During non-stop races, think about what you want to eat /drink and where it is found in the kit box when you are approaching the transitions and communicate well with your team mates at this point.*
- *In transitions follow a system, it makes it much easier when you are exhausted. Think about the best method of accessing food during each discipline and choose your 'energy' bags accordingly.*

PlanetFear media is funded by our online store. Consider shopping with us for your latest climbing and outdoor gear: [visit the planetFear shop here.](#)



Comments

There are currently no comments on this article.

Add a Comment

Title

Comment

Security Code:



Please enter the security code in the text box below.

Submit



planetFear

Home
Our Stores
About Us
Contact
Customise Your Homepage
Links
Environmental
Advertise with Us

Online Shopping

Start Shopping
Terms & Conditions
Returns Policy
Delivery
Size Guide
Privacy Policy

Help

Testimonials
Forums
Enquiries
Recycling your old electricals



Copyright © 2008 planetFear. All rights reserved.

Web design, development and hosting by MTC Media Ltd.