

Competition Day Nutrition

In the previous two articles, we've covered the importance of building a nutrition base and strategies for recovering from the physical and mental stressors of training (and life). This brings us to the last article in this nutrition series—competition day nutrition.

One of the most frequent questions I'm asked by competitive athletes is what to eat the night before and the day of a competition. My usual response is "what have you been eating the night before and the day of training"? Just as you would never try a new aiming technique or firing stance in a competition, you should never try a new nutrition plan at a competition. Familiar is key! The "perfect" competition meal is always relative to the shooter's usual diet and is not the same for everyone. Introducing an unfamiliar food or beverage during a high stress situation, no matter how text-book perfect it may be, usually results in some type of gastrointestinal discomfort.

In order to maintain that familiarity however, requires some advance planning. Foods and beverages offered at competitions are usually chosen by organizers based on customer taste

satisfaction, not on performance enhancement. The steak and/or burgers and fries served may smell good and be a crowd pleaser (especially to spectators), but the saturated fats found in these foods won't optimize a shooter's performance. If your daily diet consists of burgers and fries, then having them on competition day will unlikely hurt your performance (but is likely keeping you from reaching your overall potential on a daily basis). What should you do if high saturated fat foods are not part of your daily diet?

Bring enough food to last the whole competition day. Just as in training, be sure to consume carbohydrate and protein at least one hour prior to competing. Hopefully you've gotten used to eating every three to four hours, so make sure you have enough snacks to cover the whole day. Equipment malfunctions, late officials and weather can all be factors in prolonging what should've been an eight hour into a 10-12 hour competition day, so plan for delays! Length of time between rounds will dictate when you're able to eat, but use previous experience to guide you. If you've identified that it's harder to

focus during the third round or in the morning of the second day, be sure to fuel appropriately at those times. Peanut butter and jelly or lean meat sandwiches are quality meal choices. Nuts, trail mix, fig bars and fruits are excellent options to keep in your bag for snacking throughout the day.

Bring fluids based on previous observations of urine color and amount of fluid needed to maintain an adequate hydration status. By the time you get to a competition, you should have a good idea of how much fluid is required to keep your urine color pale, but that doesn't overfill your bladder during rounds. Remember that dehydration of as little as two percent of body mass can decrease mental focus.

In summary, competition day strategies should simply be an extension of your training nutrition routine. You'll need to make slight adjustments for being at the range longer and bringing foods and beverages to last throughout the competition day(s). You have enough stress during a competition; make your nutrition plan one less thing to worry about!

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