

Tips for success in a 24-hour Solo Mountain Bike Race

3-5 Days Leading Up to the Race

Avoid the temptation to train too much and/or too close to race day!

You will not be able to positively influence your fitness level in the days leading up to the race; however, you can negatively impact your race by training during that time (training meaning anything of significant duration or intensity). As well-known coach Jeff Cuddeback states, “The week of any event of this duration should be all about resting up and topping off your energy stores. Training is done to keep the engine lubed and tuned up, nothing more. If you think you’re going to further your fitness through training the week of your key race, you’re sadly mistaken. If you are the type to train right up to the event, you will almost certainly under perform.”

Best performances in long-duration events are achieved by getting to the starting line well rested rather than razor sharp. In doing so, you may find yourself not hitting on all cylinders during those first few minutes. In fact, you might even struggle a bit. However, your body will not forget all the training you’ve done and it will absolutely reward you for giving it the time it needed to “soak up” all of that training.

Don’t let your diet deviate too much from what got you there in the first place!

- **FLUIDS** – Don’t drink excess amounts of water in the hopes of getting a head start on your fluid requirements for the race. Consumption of roughly 32.5 to 39 ml per kilogram of body weight is a good gauge in regards to how much water you should be consuming daily (example: 80 kg athletes should drink approximately 2600 – 3120 milliliters of water daily). However, if you’ve not been following this recommendation consistently, don’t start now, as this will overwhelm your body with too much fluid too soon, which may increase the potential for hyponatremia.
- **CALORIES** – Don’t stuff yourself with extra food in the hopes that you’re “carbo loading.” The time period for carbohydrate loading (i.e., maximizing muscle glycogen storage capabilities) has, for all intents and purposes, passed. In essence, “carbo loading” is what you did in the 0-60 minutes after all your workouts leading up to the race. That’s when the glycogen synthase enzyme—which controls glycogen storage—is most active, and that’s how you topped off your glycogen stores. Any excess food you eat in the days leading up to the race is either going to be passed through the bowels or stored in adipose cells... neither of those things will benefit you.
- **SODIUM** – Don’t consume extra sodium (salt) in the hopes that you’ll be “topping off your body stores” prior to the race. Since the average person already consumes approximately 6000 to 8000 mg per day (if not more), an amount well above the upper end recommended dose of 2300-2400 mg/day, there is absolutely no need to increase that amount in the days prior to the race. (Hint: Adopting a low-sodium diet will do wonders for both your health and athletic performance). High sodium intake, especially in the days leading up to the race, is a recipe for disaster because it will greatly increase the potential for disruption of the hormonal mechanisms that control sodium regulation, re-circulation, and conservation. In the days leading up the race, be especially cognizant of the salt content in your foods, especially if you go out to eat. Dining out can easily increase your already-high salt intake dramatically (into double figures!).

The Night before the Race

Eat clean, eat until you’re satisfied, and then call it a night

You can’t positively affect muscle glycogen storage capabilities the night before the race, a time when the glycogen synthase enzyme—which again, is the enzyme that controls glycogen storage—is inactive (hint: that’s why post-workout refueling is so important). Consume complex carbohydrates, some high quality protein, and low-to-no saturated fat, and be sure to drink sufficient amounts (but not too much) of water. Skip the alcohol, fatty foods, and dessert... save those “rewards” for after the race.

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The Morning of the Race

No calories three hours prior to the race

Let's assume you've been really good—you've been training hard (yet wisely) and remembering to replenish your body with adequate amounts of high quality calories as soon as possible after each and every one of your workouts. Great! You've now built up a nice 60-90 minute reservoir of premium muscle glycogen, the first fuel your body will use when your long race begins. Don't blow it now by eating something an hour or two prior to the start of the race!

Do you know what happens when you eat within three hours of exercise? Your muscle glycogen stores get burned much more rapidly... in long-duration events that's definitely not performance enhancing!

Don't sacrifice sleep to eat

You're going to be out there racing your bike for a long, long time. So why sacrifice all the benefits of sleep during the one last opportunity you have to get a full night's worth prior to the race? It's not necessary to get up early, thus sacrificing sleep, to eat! Believe it or not, you can actually start the race on an empty stomach. Your brain may be saying, "I'm hungry. Feed me." Your muscles, however are saying, "Hey, we're good to go!"

If you simply must eat prior to a race but don't have a comfortable three-hour window in which to complete a pre-race meal, a better strategy than eating 1-2 hours prior to the race is to consume 1-2 servings of Hammer Gel 5-10 minutes prior to the start. That will top off liver glycogen stores nicely (the goal of the pre-race meal), and provide some calories to augment muscle glycogen stores, but without negatively affecting how muscle glycogen is utilized.

30-45 Minutes before the Race

"Pre-emptive strike" dose of Endurolytes (1-6 capsules)

Taking your first dose of Endurolytes, washed down with water, will allow your body to have a supply of these key electrolytic minerals "on board" prior to needing them. Taking this dose now—and your dose will be dependent on your body weight, the weather, how well or poorly you're acclimated to the weather, and other variables—will cover your first hour's needs.

5 Minutes before the Race

Consume 1-2 servings of Hammer Gel

This is optional if you've had a pre-race meal; it's a wise strategy to employ if you haven't had a pre-race meal.

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Fueling During the Race

Replenish, don't replace!

When it comes to calories, fluids, and electrolytes, the human body is not designed to accept from your fuel donation an amount that is anywhere near what it's losing. The body knows this, which is why it has numerous hormonal (survival) mechanisms built in, which very easily "bridge the gap" between what the body is losing and what it can accept from you. Don't try to replace what you're losing, but instead replenish with "body cooperative" doses of the following...

- **Fluids:** Approximately 590 – 740 ml hourly
- **Sodium chloride (salt):** 100-600 mg hourly (1-6 Endurolytes, which includes salt, plus all of the other important electrolytic minerals)
- **Calories:** 240-280 calories hourly

... Making adjustments based on these factors: age, weight, racing stress, fitness, acclimatization levels, and weather conditions.

Use a "carbohydrate + protein" fuel (Perpetuem) as your primary-to-sole fuel

Carbs alone won't satisfy all of your energy requirements once you exceed two hours or so. Protein will have to satisfy roughly 10% of your energy requirements. You have two choices:

1. Use Perpetuem, a fuel that contains complex carbohydrates, protein, and healthy fat (think of it as "a meal in a bottle").
2. Allow your body to literally feed upon itself (that is, digest your own muscle tissue) to make fuel.

If you chose #1 your body will thank you immensely and you'll definitely notice the positive results in your performance as the race progresses.

Please keep in mind that you can still use Hammer gel or HEED during the race, if desired; all of the Hammer Nutrition fuels are 100% compatible with each other. Going for a couple hours solely on Hammer Gel, for example, is perfectly acceptable. However, your primary fuel should be Perpetuem—no less than 2/3 – 3/4 of the time—as it will fulfill your energy requirements more completely than a "carbohydrate only" fuel (Hammer Gel or HEED) can.

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Solid food is a luxury, not a necessity!

There's nothing wrong with consuming a little solid food on occasion during prolonged exercise as a pleasant diversion from the monotony of liquid fuel consumption, but you must:

1. Make wise choices. Choose foods that have little or no refined sugar and saturated fats. Don't think, "I'm a calorie burning machine so I can eat anything that I want." What you put in your body greatly determines what you get out of it. Remember: garbage in, garbage out!
2. Make solid food consumption the exception, not the rule.

Solid food is harder to digest than liquid, and it requires more time, water, and electrolytes. Relying too heavily on solid foods can leave you feeling lethargic, bloated, and nauseated. Liquid fuels digest and absorb readily, so you avoid those unwanted maladies. Most of all, avoid all junk foods, which contain lots of saturated fats and refined sugars, at all times. Believe me, when the latter stages of the race are upon you, you'll be thanking yourself that you took a pass on that sugar & fat laden pastry earlier in the race.

Hammer Bars are an ideal way to satisfy the need to eat "real food" during prolonged races. Additionally, taking a look at the list of ingredients in Hammer Bars will convince you that your body is receiving a superior source of high-quality nutrition, which will translate into high-quality energy.

Consume Endurolytes every 30-60 minutes

This product will fulfill electrolyte requirements more effectively and completely than salt tablets. Be flexible with the dosing to match the weather and terrain and whatever "I need more electrolyte support" signals (irregular pedal cadence, muscle twitches) your body is giving you.

After the Race

Recovery begins as soon as the race ends

After a full 24 hours of racing, your body will pretty much be "on empty." It's crucial, therefore, that you start the recovery process immediately; otherwise your muscle tissue will remain damaged and immune system functioning will be severely compromised. After a race of this duration, a four- to six-scoop serving of Recoverite—consumed over the next 30-60 minutes—will help "refill the tank" in terms of glycogen restoration, it will provide the amino acids the muscles need for reparation purposes, and it will provide a hefty dose of the multi-beneficial amino acid glutamine to assist in a number of bodily functions, including immune system boosting.

About the Author:

Steve Born is a technical advisor for Hammer Nutrition with two decades of involvement in the health food industry. He has worked with hundreds of athletes—ranging from the recreational athlete to world-class professional athlete—helping them to optimize their supplement/fueling program. Steve is a three-time RAAM finisher, the 1994 Furnace Creek 508 Champion, 1999 runner-up, the only cyclist in history to complete a Double Furnace Creek 508, and is the holder of two Ultra Marathon Cycling records. In February 2004 Steve was inducted into the Ultra Marathon Cycling Hall of Fame.

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