

CARBO LOADING: **NOW IS THE TIME!**

Think post-workout
replenishment, not
prerace pasta

BY STEVE BORN

With the first of your key races just around the corner, you're probably fine-tuning your training and nutrition to give yourself every advantage possible on race day. But have you begun carbo loading? If not, you should start now — not the night, or even the week, before your race.

You may be thinking, “Carbo loading? Now? Are you crazy?”

Hear me out, though. True carbo loading throughout your entire training season will result in noticeably higher quality training sessions and better race performances. You'll also be recovering optimally between all of your workouts, which is equally important to race day performance.

The only way to truly carbo load is to do it g-r-a-d-u-a-l-l-y. Think of it this way: When you start your training season, you don't bust out with hill repeats and high-intensity speed work from the get-go, do you? No, you do base miles, and then gradually increase the duration and intensity of your training so that your body becomes more accustomed to the stress you put on it. Additionally, you don't wait until the week before the race to start training, do you? Of course not!

These examples can be applied to carbo loading as well, which is more appropriately defined as maximizing muscle glycogen stores.

Muscle glycogen? What's that?

When you begin a workout or race, the primary fuel your body uses for the first 60-90 minutes or so is known as muscle glycogen, a glucose polymer (complex carbohydrate) that contains 10s of thousands of glucose units arranged in branched chains. As your stores of muscle glycogen become depleted, your body switches over to burning fat reserves along with carbohydrates and protein consumed during exercise. You've got only a finite amount of this premium fuel, but its importance is hard to overstate. In fact, several studies have shown that pre-exercise muscle glycogen level is the most important energy determinant for exercise performance.

Maximizing glycogen stores is easy!

Here's all you need to do:

1. Train intelligently and consistently.
2. “Refill the tank” with high-quality carbohydrates and protein ASAP after all of your workouts.

That's it! That's what true “carbo loading” is all about. It is NOT what or how much you eat the week or the night before the race. It is the replenishment of carbohydrates and protein within the first 60 minutes after ALL of your workouts in the weeks and months leading up to the race.

Maximizing muscle glycogen stores (carbo loading) is a gradual process that takes several weeks to happen. It cannot be truly achieved in the week leading up to the race.



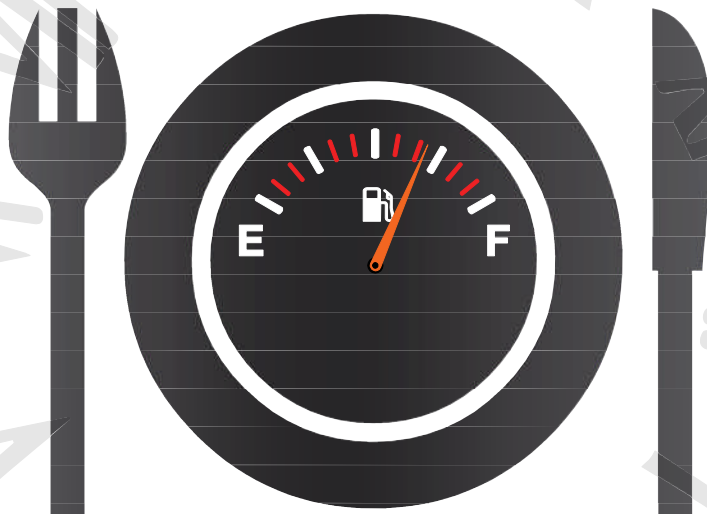
How it works

Along with insulin, the enzyme glycogen synthase converts food carbohydrates into glycogen and stores it in muscle cells. This also drives the muscle repair and rebuilding process. However, to maximize the recovery process, you must take advantage of glycogen synthase when it's most active. Carbohydrate replenishment as soon as possible after exercise, when your body is most receptive to carbohydrate uptake, maximizes both glycogen synthesis and storage.

The oft used phrase "strike while the iron is hot" absolutely applies to recovery. So before you get out of your sweaty workout clothes, before you hit the shower, and before you get horizontal, put some fuel back into your body. Do that now, when glycogen synthase is most active, and you will enjoy a HUGE advantage over the athletes who blew off post-workout refueling or waited too long to do it.

What to do

Give yourself a major advantage in all of your training sessions, and especially on race day. Put quality nutrition into your body as soon as possible after all of your workouts. Recoverite or Hammer Whey + a quality carbohydrate source will help you "refill the tank," effectively replenishing and maximizing muscle glycogen stores. That is the true definition of "carbo loading." If you haven't started already, begin the process now. Your body will thank you, and the quality of your workouts and races will prove it. [HN]



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