



Fueling for ACA High School MTB Racing

These are guidelines aimed to help coaches, parents, and student-athletes avoid some of the common nutritional mistakes that lead to not-so-great-experiences on race day. Keep in mind, every rider is different and sometimes the best learning opportunities come from making mistakes.

Fuel Right & Feel Great

Follow these fueling guidelines for your upcoming ACA high school races, or for any competition that lasts 1-1.5 hours and requires 100% effort from the get-go. We recommend practicing these fueling strategies during your practices and workouts. Race day isn't the best time to try something new. But with a little practice, you'll find that fueling right will lead to positive results.

The Night Before

Eat a sensible meal with some lean protein and a carbohydrate of your choice—and don't forget your veggies! Lean protein may include white chicken meat, fish, quinoa, beans, pork chops with fat trimmed, or ground turkey to name a few. Good carbohydrate options include rice, potatoes, quinoa, and pastas. Try some different options other than wheat (e.g. pasta) as it's not uncommon for some riders to feel bloated from wheat. Generally, avoid stuffing yourself full in order to help the body relax and prepare for the next day.

A top priority for athletes of all ages should be to get sufficient sleep the night before any race or big training day - so sleep tight!

The Pre-Race Meal

Races under two hours don't give you a lot of time to fuel - that's why the pre-race meal is a top priority to keep your muscles happy and your mind on the trail. This meal is most often breakfast.

As long as you have sufficient time, ideally finish your pre-race meal 3 hours before your start time. Once again, there is no need to stuff-yourself. The key to a good pre-race breakfast is keep it simple to prepare, and use simple ingredients—mostly carbohydrates and a little protein.

Here are some examples of popular pre-race meals:

- Oatmeal with a little milk, almond butter, or peanut butter for protein
- Pancakes with yogurt or peanut butter
- Granola with yogurt
- White rice and fried eggs (recommended for those with a sensitive stomach)

After your meal, switch to water only, or [Hammer Fizz](#) if you like.

10 Minutes Before Race Start

It's good to get in a simple fuel close to your race start to raise your blood sugar levels and make sure your brain has the fuel it needs for the focus required to race.

We recommend:

- 1 serving [Hammer Gel](#) + water
- ½ banana + water
- ½ small bike bottle with [Heed Sports Drink](#)

During the Race

If your race is over an hour, plan on fueling during the race. We recommend a Hammer Gel at about 45 minutes into your race or fueling with 1 scoop of Heed Sports Drink, per bottle, per hour.

Recovery

Timing is key. Within 30 minutes of your finish, it's important to get in a meal and begin refueling. If real food isn't an option—or a rider simply doesn't feel like eating so soon after their finish—a recovery drink like [Recoverite](#) is a great option. If there's an ideal time to indulge, this is it!

Early Races

Don't sacrifice sleep for food. If you have an especially early race—you can skip breakfast altogether if you had a high quality pre-race dinner. After waking, drink only water until you begin your warm-up, or even until 10 minutes before race start. You may be surprised and earn yourself a PR with this plan!

If desired, a rider can have a small snack after waking. A sports bar or a banana are good options.

Coaching Notes

It is always beneficial to teach the importance of food quality, and on combining foods. That is, to combine protein, fiber (fruit, vegetable, whole grain), and fat at most every meal.

and snack. This will improve blood sugar stabilization and improve concentration for school, and of course help on the bike as well.

Keep in mind that what kids have access to varies widely, and we want to avoid labeling foods as 'bad'. Instead, offer suggestions for simple foods that are inexpensive, widely available, and unprocessed. We want kids to enjoy their meals, take an interest in ingredients, their own food preparation, and ask questions.

When working with youth and young athletes, it is never appropriate to equate performance with 'leanness' or suggest dieting or caloric restrictions. In particular, for developing girls and young women, weight gain is normal, healthy, and expected.

Nervousness on race day is normal. Nerves often make us less interested in foods we typically like, and can also lead to multiple trips to the bathroom race morning. *These responses are normal.* If nerves progress to severe so that a student-athlete refuses to eat, gets sick, or is unable to sleep, those responses can remove fun from the experience and need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis.
