



Fueling for ACA Middle 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 middle school races, or for any competition that lasts 20-40 minutes 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!

You won't likely have time to eat a full breakfast in the morning, so make sure to prioritize dinner the night before.

Morning Wake-Up

It's a good idea to be up at least one-hour before your race start. Eating immediately isn't necessary, but a small snack may hold off a larger appetite.

Consider the following options for a morning snack:

- Banana
- Crackers
- ½ a [Raw Energy Hammer Bar](#)

Drinking water in the morning is perfect. There isn't a need for added sugars at this time (juices, sports drinks, etc).

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

It's a good idea to bring along some water in a bike bottle on your bike. You won't need any added drink mixes as the racing is short and only lasts 20-40 minutes. You may want to practice drinking water while riding during practices. And if you haven't had a chance to practice yet, just plan on pulling aside the trail to drink when you get thirsty.

Recovery Breakfast

Congrats on finishing! The finish of a race is a fun time. You'll feel a lot of emotion—possibly energized from the effort and excited to share the experience with your friends and family. Enjoy it all, but once some time has passed (no more than 30 minutes), make sure to get in that full breakfast you skipped for your early race start.

This meal may need to be prepared in advance—and that's where your family and coaches can help out. The best recovery meals combine some protein with a carb.

Here are some easy make-ahead options for after your race:

- Bagel and cream cheese
- Oatmeal with a little peanut butter (or almond butter)
- [Raw Energy Hammer Bar](#) + hard boiled egg
- And if you've ever wanted a cookie for breakfast—go for it! 😊

Coaching Notes

Middle school is a good age to challenge kids to identify different types of food—carbohydrates, protein, and fat. When discussing nutrition or meal options, challenge kids to identify what kind of nutrients common foods provide. For example, how can you add protein to a bagel?

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.
