

YOUR EPIC RACE: THE MORNING OF RACE DAY

PART III IN THE SERIES ON RACE DAY NUTRITION AND HYDRATION

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You awake to a 5:30 a.m. automated wake up call, not really sure who it was or why they called. But then your trusty Timex beeps on the bedside table and a concert of panic and excitement rush through you as you grasp the magnitude of this day. Months of preparation, briefly derailed by a sore knee, seem almost a past life as you climb out of a deep, prerace sleep.

Race start time is in three hours and the Weather Channel says it's going to be a warm, breezy day. You reassure yourself that you'll be long into your second post race beer before the 85 degree mark is reached. But suddenly the race preparation questions flood back to your attention. "If I had a good meal last night, what do I do this morning? My knee is a bit more stiff than usual and I think last night's Aleve has worn off. Do I take one or two this morning? Man, I can't get distracted by that now; with a little help I can push through the pain... I know I can."

You realize a good shower will clear your head and give you a reprieve from these questions. You look in the mirror just before you get in and notice how bloodshot your eyes are. Spring has once again gripped you in the yearly pollen fest, and this morning you feel like your sinuses are as puffy as your eyes. "Where is that Sudafed* packet in my travel bag? I know it is here somewhere!"

These questions and more flood your mind as you think through the specifics of your morning of your big race. Your response to these questions and subsequent actions could make the difference between a personal best and visiting a medical tent for an extended rest!

Let's focus our attention on these questions and a few others in this often overlooked part of your epic race preparation. Your enemy, The Wall, whom you have met in our previous articles, would love for you to pass right through these few hours without a care. The guy in the NASCAR shirt is down the street at I-Hop slamming a Buffalo Bill's Breakfast Bounty. Don't count him out! He is a bit unorthodox in his preparation, but he is in your age group!

Back in December's Part II article, we reviewed critical aspects of your race nutrition and hydration that must be acknowledged on the day before your big race. Assuming those pearls were carefully considered, you are ready for a few more key facts centered on the morning of this momentous day. So please take at least one ear bud out, lean this way and we'll begin.

Remember from our previous conversation that the day before is where the real tank-filling occurs for energy accessed during your race. However, your basal metabolic rate over-night did use a little gasoline, so the goal before the gun this morning is simply to top the tank off. Please remember this one aspect of gastrointestinal physiology this morning: the more you cram into the tank, the more blood is shunted to your GI tract and away from your muscles. So, my medically anealed hint and personal



Photo by Nat Marry

experience is to eat no more than 200 calories of a solid food substance. This usually equates to a half of a banana, or a protein enhanced breakfast bar, a GU or two with water, or four Jolly Ranchers and a handful of Skittles.

The last recommendation was from the guy in the NASCAR shirt, so take it for what it is worth! Avoid any fatty components to this morning's "meal" because that will only prolong the shunting of blood away from your arms and legs. This Sunrise Sampler meal should also be just enough stimulus to your GI tract to move things along from yesterday in time for a quick read on the porcelain throne. If you get to the race site a bit early, be sure a roll of toilet paper accompanies the bag with your singlet, race belt, water bottles, and heart rate monitor. From the throne of the Port-o-Potty is not the place to be trying to bum a piece of unused TP!

Also, as per last month's charge, do not try a new supplement or new energy drink this morning. The possibility of seeing everything you had to eat yesterday is much more likely if you do. Hydration is key, and you really can't drink too much if it is an equivalent of a half water/Gatorade mix, or something similar in its concentration. If you've eaten the Sunrise Sampler mentioned above, then water is all you really need. The only downside to one glass too many is a full bladder at mile two; not fun to run this way. So, always pop in to see the Portable Plastic Potty Provider before the gun goes off. You'll be lighter on your feet!

Well, you are out of the shower and putting the last pin in your race number. You bend down to double check the laces on your shoes and, ouch! There's that tweak in your knee again. You say to yourself, "I came this far, I'm not stopping now!" In your race bag you have Motrin and Tylenol, and you even have a few Lortab from an old dental procedure just in case something really hurts. Which do you choose? Without ret-

ting too far off track, just remember that Tylenol is least problematic in your body when it is stressed from a hydration perspective, such as an endurance race. Motrin, Aleve, aspirin, naproxen, Celebrex, and other oral anti-inflammatory medications can worsen fluid and electrolyte imbalances in an athlete whose hydration status might be compromised from over-heating or poor race hydration.

There are now topical anti-inflammatory gels that can be a great addition to an oral Tylenol if needed. The absorption of the gel

into the bloodstream is minimal. Opiates such as Lortab, Darvocet, and Tylenol#3 can zap your body's energy in an endurance event better than it can zap your pain. If it really hurts that bad, grab a spot at the water stop and help out. It is not worth it to compete in this race and then be out for months.

If you can, also avoid using any decongestants on the morning of your race as well. These medications have the intended goal of constricting arteries in your nose. However, this same component can cause an increase in your heart rate by itself, and it is felt to be a contributing factor in negative cardiac events in athletes of endurance races. Think about it. Your heart is already being pushed to the max and is probably pumping as fast and hard as it safely can. Then, you add into this mix something that adds further stimulation, and it can potentially go haywire.

Please ask your regular doctor about any medication you take and its safety in endurance athletics. He or she can give you tips on how to minimize any risk if it is a necessary medicine for your basic health needs.

Well, your race chip is on your ankle and your ear buds firmly planted for the experience. The dude in the NASCAR shirt is slugging down a Pepsi just behind you; nothing like one carb-loading effort for the road!

Tune in next time for the most interesting and detailed conversation we will have in this series: the physiology, pearls, and pitfalls of nutrition and hydration during your epic race!

ATHENA RUNNING (continued)

The biggest award I received though was losing 60 pounds during my training! I not only attribute my weight loss to running, but also to a healthier diet. My chest pains vanished and the dormant running goddess inside of me was let loose. My father, who is a rather large man as well, recently diagnosed with Type II diabetes, saw my accomplishment that day on the Tech campus, and he vowed to run the following year. He lost 40 pounds himself, and with modification of his diet and running, almost eliminated his diabetes completely.

I did not allow being a 160+ pound Athena to hold me back in other areas of my fitness life either. In April 2009, I studied for my group fitness certification with AFAA (Aerobics and Fitness Association of America) and passed. While I have intense love for running, step aerobics draws a close second place in my heart. I interviewed with L.A. Fitness in Rowlett and got the job. Now I teach step aerobics, aqua aerobics, and bodyworks at the Rowlett, Richardson, and Plano-East locations. It is not easy being an Athena and standing in front of a class of gym members, but I remember the days that I hung my head low and didn't want to make any eye contact with people in my small gym where I used to live. I know how daunting it was to be seen as the extremely obese girl that wanted to have her life back. If I can smile to one Athena in the gym and invite her to my fitness class, maybe I can inspire her to find that inner Athena goddess that is waiting to be unleashed! My exercise journey prompted me to start my own blog, too (www.girlruns5k.blogspot.com).

It's been nine years after those first few running steps, and I just completed my 26th race! I've run 19 5Ks, three 10Ks, one 15K, and three half marathons! I wish Mallory knew how inspirational she has been in my life. Maybe she is out there reading this article, will visit my blog, and we can reconnect again and go running like old times.

Athenas and Clydesdales, I'm cheering for you! Keep running even though your shins and ankles are screaming at you to quit. I know how it feels to carry all that weight for 3.1 miles, and you can do it. Don't you dare give up on your dreams! Please cross the finish line and keep your head high.