

# Nutrition for Cyclists

There really are only a few simple rules for C-SIG cyclists. You're not racers and most of you are not elite athletes who have to worry about everything you put into your stomachs. Here are the basics:

1. **Eat a balanced diet every day.** That means roughly 35-40% of your calories should come from carbohydrates; 30-35% should come from protein; and 30% from fat.
  - a. Complex carbohydrates are better than simple carbohydrates, meaning more fruits, vegetables and whole grains, less refined sugar. (Okay, you can reward yourself with that cookie or gooey cupcake, but don't overdo it!)
  - b. Fat should be mono or polyunsaturated, not saturated or trans fats. Examples of monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats include olive, canola, soybean, corn, sunflower and peanut oil; foods that contain these "good" fats include avocados, fish, soybean based foods and many nuts. Animal fats are generally saturated – that doesn't mean you can't eat meat, just do so in moderation and try to eat lean cuts. Most processed foods no longer contain trans fats, but reading the label is a good idea.
2. **Monitor quantity.** During the SIG you will be riding perhaps much more than you're used to.
  - a. Now is **NOT** the time to go on a diet! You need plenty of energy for the riding you'll be doing. If you're a bit overweight at the start of the SIG, don't worry about it. You may not actually lose weight as you ride more, but you'll be exchanging some excess fat for new muscle, so you may find your body becoming a bit slimmer.
  - b. On the other hand, because of your increased activity level, you may feel very hungry, particularly after a longer ride. When you first get home, have a recovery drink or snack – probably between 150 and 200 calories – such as a glass of chocolate milk or chocolate soy milk and a piece of fruit. (Plan ahead and make sure you have this ready for when you get home.) You should have this within the first hour after finishing your ride. Make sure your recovery snack contains some protein as well as carbs – your muscles need it right away to start recovering. Having this snack will also help curb your hunger so you won't overeat at dinner. Remember, it takes a while for the "I'm full" message to get from your stomach to your brain, so eat slowly to prevent overeating.
  - c. How much you need to eat will depend on your size, how fit you are and how far and fast you're riding. It may take some trial & error to figure out

what your consumption needs to be. You should probably not eat less than you did when you weren't riding, but you may not need to eat too much more. Eating 5 or 6 small meals a day is usually better than eating 2 or 3 big meals.

### 3. How to eat on Ride Day.

- a. Eat a good, balanced **breakfast** the morning of the ride (protein, carbs and some fat). You cannot ride 15-20 miles on an empty stomach. **Never** come to a ride without having eaten. If you're not used to eating breakfast, ease your way into it during the first couple of weeks of the SIG by starting with yogurt and fruit; but by the third week you should be eating something more substantial – move up to oatmeal with fruit and a piece of whole grain toast with butter or a peanut butter & banana sandwich on whole grain bread. If you're into it, eggs, toast and some turkey bacon make a good breakfast. If you're eating a big, heavier breakfast, though, allow some extra time to digest it before heading out to the ride.
  - b. **Lunch** during the ride. The first couple of weeks, when rides are short, we'll probably have more of a snack stop – Dunkin Donuts or a bagel shop. But as the rides get longer we'll have a real lunch stop, often at a diner. (While COVID is still around, we'll stop at a deli to pick up food for a picnic outdoors.) Do NOT eat heavy, greasy food like a burger. You still have to get home, and cycle club Rule #1 is "There's always a hill after lunch!" It may take some experimenting to learn what kinds of foods you can eat during a ride. For some people a second breakfast is ideal: French toast with some bacon or an egg & cheese sandwich or an omelet. For others, a turkey sandwich or a salad works. You know your own stomach...just be kind to it. Be sure to eat sufficient calories for the ride home, but without overeating.
  - c. **Snacking**. You should ALWAYS have some kind of snack food with you on the bike; whether that's an energy bar or nuts & raisins or Fig Newtons, you just need something to give you quick calories during a brief break. Even if it's a short ride and you may not need a snack under normal circumstances, bring something anyway because you never know when someone (even you!) might have a mechanical that will keep us out on the road an extra half hour.
  - d. **Recovery**. See section 2b above for a discussion on recovery drink or snack. In an emergency, beer & peanuts will also work as your recovery drink/snack. 😊
4. **Hydration**. One of the most important rules of cycling is to stay hydrated. That means drinking a healthy amount of fluids (65-85oz, depending on your size &

activity level) every day so that your body stays hydrated.

- a. On the morning of the ride, drink an extra glass of water.
- b. On the bike, always carry either two bottles of fluid or a Camelbak. (The bottles should be cycling water bottles, not a Poland Spring bottle that can fall out of your bottle cage.) One bottle can be an electrolyte drink, which may be important in warm weather, but you should also have plain water in one bottle or the Camelbak.
- c. During the ride it's important to remember to drink. You may not yet be proficient at getting your bottle out of the cage while riding. That's okay, but then you have to remember to drink when you're stopped at a traffic light. Your leaders will often remind you to drink during the ride. And during the SIG we'll usually have a pit stop after 8-12 miles. You should be drinking at least 2-3 ounces of fluid every mile (about 1 bottle per hour), and more than that in warm weather. If you are a person who sweats profusely, consider getting a Camelbak, which makes it much easier to stay hydrated while you're riding.
- d. After the ride you need to rehydrate. You may not realize how much fluid your body has lost during the ride, especially in colder weather when you don't feel wet with sweat. Drink plenty of water during the first couple of hours after the ride. If you forget to rehydrate, you may start to feel a headache – this is often a first sign of dehydration.