



## Surf Life Saving

### Characteristics of the Sport

Surf Life Saving is a large voluntary organisation that provides a community service to the public by patrolling surf beaches throughout Australia and the world. In addition to community duties, surf life saving members can compete in a range of events designed to fine tune skills essential for patrolling beaches. The surf life saving movement has competitions that cater for the youngest surf life savers, "Nippers", right through to master level athletes. The majority of surf life saving competitions are held on the beach and in open surf, however major international competitions are also held in still water conditions in a standard Olympic (50 metre) pool. Events vary considerably in terms of the physiological demands of the event and the skills required for success.

### Training

The vast variety of events involved in surf life saving mean that training requirements vary considerably. Athletes need to incorporate sessions that train fitness, strength and skill. For elite athletes, training is a full time occupation.

### Competition

Surf life saving incorporates a huge number and variety of events. Visit the Surf Life Saving Australia website ([www.slsa.asn.au](http://www.slsa.asn.au)) for full details. Athletes typically specialise in one event or compete in a stream of events that have similar physiological demands. For example, beach competitors compete in beach sprints, beach flags and beach relay events - all explosive, short duration, power events lasting 5-12 seconds in duration. "Boaties" specialise in surf boat races. Ironman and ironwoman competitors compete in a range of events including multidiscipline events such as ironman/ironwoman events, individual events such as board, ski or swim races and team events such as board rescue and board or ski teams.

Athletes are typically required to compete several times throughout a day's competition in order to progress from initial rounds through to finals. This means that athletes are often required to stay within the confines of the competition arena throughout the entire day. Major national and international surf carnivals are usually contested over three or four days, however it is more usual for carnivals to be held over the course of a weekend.

### Physical Characteristics

Physical characteristics differ for different disciplines. In general, surf life saving competitors are lean and well muscled. Some of the power and strength based events require high levels of musculature.

### Common Nutrition Issues

The training and competition demands vary greatly for different events. It is therefore difficult to capture the individual nutrition needs of surf life saving athletes with one fact sheet. This fact sheet will focus on the challenges surf life saving competitors face in meeting their competition nutrition needs.

### Eating on the Road

Surf life saving competitors are often required to travel domestically to weekend surf carnivals. In many instances, athletes are required to compete the day they travel or early the following day. This being the case, athletes need to ensure their travel arrangements don't interrupt their nutritional preparation leading into competition. The following tips will assist in tackling issues that surf life saving competitions face when travelling to a carnival:





- Rather than relying on the food available at service stations or airports, pack healthy, nutritious snacks such as fruit, sandwiches or rolls, juice poppers, muesli/breakfast bars, low-fat fruit yoghurt and fruche, dried fruit and nut mixes, and water.
- If you are relying on local restaurants while away at the competition, check the internet before leaving home for the types of restaurants that are located close to your accommodation. This will save you driving around trying to find a suitable place to eat when you arrive. Italian, Mexican, Asian and buffet-style restaurants like Sizzler all offer excellent choices to serve as a pre-competition evening meal.
- Plan ahead - if you will be self-catering be sure to have your menu planned and any specialty foods such as liquid meal supplements, sports bars and sports drinks on hand. You can have your groceries ordered ahead of time by using home shop in most cities through major supermarkets. This is a great time saver, particularly if you are responsible for catering for a large group of athletes.

## Keeping Pace with Fluid Needs on the Beach

There are a number of factors that are likely to result in high daily fluid needs for surf life saving competitors. For starters, surf carnivals are typically scheduled in the summer months throughout Australia. Secondly, athletes can be expected to compete anytime throughout the day with the first events starting as early as 7:00 am and final events as late as 6:00 pm. Thirdly, athletes are exposed to direct sunlight while competing and marshalling for events throughout the day. In view of this, failing to keep pace with daily fluid losses during a day's competition is likely to be the major nutritional hurdle for athletes aiming to maximise their performance throughout the course of a surf carnival.

Handy tips for keeping pace with daily fluid losses include:

- Always keep a drink bottle handy. It is difficult to know how much time you will wait around for the start of your race so, when marshalling for events, always keep a drink bottle with you. It is virtually impossible to keep pace with fluid losses if you simply rely on drinks at the club tent. Don't play catch-up, get organised and use a water bottle throughout the day.
- Keep your drinks cooled in an insulated container. It is likely that your fluid intake will decrease if your fluid is warm and unappealing. Use a couple of frozen juice poppers to keep your other drinks cold - once the poppers are semi-defrosted, they are a refreshing fluid choice.
- Have a variety of fluids on hand. Water, cordial, juice and sports drink are all good options. Using a combination of fluids will provide a range of tastes throughout the day which will often stimulate your fluid intake. You don't want your fluid intake to drop off because you are bored with the flavours on hand. Sports drink, cordial and juice offer the added benefit of simultaneously assisting to meet your daily carbohydrate needs. These choices are likely to be best straight after racing as they will assist in rehydration and refuelling your active muscles.
- During extremely hot conditions, when sweat losses are unusually high, it is useful to include fluids that contain electrolytes as this will help your body retain the fluid consumed. Sports drinks have an advantage over other beverages as they contain small amounts of sodium and potassium which assist with rehydration. Furthermore, having a snack or meal around the time you drink will also assist your body in retaining the fluid. Snacks such as a sandwich, crackers, muesli/breakfast bar, handful of rice crackers or a fruit bun are all excellent choices.

Alcohol is part of the surf life saving culture, as it is with many other Australian sports. After a day's competition, relying exclusively on alcoholic drinks to rehydrate is





ineffective and will likely cause a further loss of fluid from the body. However, incorporating a couple of low or mid-strength alcoholic drinks in combination with other non-alcoholic drinks won't negatively impact on your ability to rehydrate following a strenuous day of racing.

## Fuelling Up on Race Day

Getting your food and fluid intake right on competition day is critical to racing well. Although a single event in surf life saving doesn't deplete muscle fuel stores, competing in several short races throughout the day will. To take this one step further - racing several times a day, over two or three days (e.g. State or National Championships) will place further importance on refuelling muscle fuel stores during the day. Carbohydrate is the preferred fuel source during high intensity exercise and can be quickly depleted during the prolonged endurance exercise or intermittent high intensity exercise involved in many surf life saving events. Therefore, during race day, targeting carbohydrate-rich snacks and meal should be your focus.

Although most surf life saving competitors have probably heard the virtues of carbohydrate, competitors are often faced with a number of barriers in reaching suggested guidelines. Factors that are difficult to control and are likely to impact on carbohydrate intake during a surf carnival include:

- The varying start time of an event - without a known start time it is difficult to plan your food and fluid intake. Many athletes faced with this dilemma opt to eat nothing to avoid the chance they might be called upon to race shortly after eating.
- The time spent competing in an event - in rough conditions, some surf events can take two or three times longer than expected, placing extra demands on fuel needs.

The following tips will assist in meeting fuel needs while competing in a surf carnival:

- Be sure to have a carbohydrate-rich meal at the start of the day. A breakfast based around foods such as cereal, toast, baked beans, spaghetti, pancakes, juice and fruit will offer you the best start to a day of racing. If you're racing early in the morning and you have limited time on your hands, having a lighter option such as toast or a couple of fruit buns with a sports drink may be preferred.
- If you are too nervous to eat on race day substitute your breakfast with a liquid meal supplement such as PowerBar Protein Plus Drinkpowder or Sustagen Sport. These are a carbohydrate-rich, easily digested, low-fibre option.
- Snacking on easily digested carbohydrate-rich snacks throughout the day means you can adjust your intake according to the competition schedule. Relying on a large mid-day meal may catch you off guard if race times are changed in the early afternoon.
- Have a range of portable snacks on hand. Sandwiches, pikelets with jam, fruit buns, scones, breakfast/muesli bars, dried fruit and nut mix, low-fat fruit yoghurt or fruche, creamed rice, crackers or rice cakes with spread are all good examples of portable, carbohydrate-based snacks. Sports bars are also a great option offering a portable, compact carbohydrate-based snack to have during or between exercise.
- Sports drinks, cordial and juice assist athletes in meeting carbohydrate and fluid needs simultaneously. Using a combination of these fluids along with your favourite carbohydrate snacks will assist in meeting daily carbohydrate needs while racing

## Race Day Recovery Bar

One way to ensure you or your team have all your nutritional requirements covered on race day is to have a "Race Day Recovery Bar". With a little preparation, a race day





recovery bar can provide all the essential foods and fluids for race day. Look for items that are carbohydrate-based, are portable and convenient to use. The essential ingredients of a recovery bar are:

- An insulated cooler - preferably with two compartments - one for cold items and one for dry items.
- Fluid - frozen juice poppers, water, sports drink (either ready-to-drink or pre-made from powder) and a ready-to-drink liquid meal supplement (e.g. Sustagen Sport tetrapack).
- Food - suitable options may include fruit (fresh and canned are both great options), muesli/breakfast bars, dried fruit and nut mix, sports bars (e.g. PowerBar Performance Bars), scones, fruit buns, crackers, low-fat fruit yoghurt. For a more extensive list refer to the section Fuelling Up On Race Day.
- Ice - not essential if some of the drinks are frozen as these will act to cool the other drinks.

## Case Study

Tony is an ironman competitor who is expected to compete in several events each day at the upcoming National Surf Life Saving Championships. If all goes to plan, the middle day of racing (Saturday) will be chaotic. Tony will have to compete in one ironman event, two heats of the board, the surf race semi-final, a semi-final of the taplin relay, a round of board teams and two rounds of board rescue.

Tony never plans his day's intake on competition day. He eats whatever is handy for breakfast, usually drinks water during the day and snacks on barbeque shapes when he gets a chance. Tony has never taken much interest in what he eats during competition. However, he has recently started considering his food and fluid options as a teammate has made some noticeable gains in performance after starting to use sports bars. Tony uses a range of supplements, but hasn't bothered to use sports drinks or sports bars in the past. He wasn't sure where to start looking for help, so spoke to his coach who advised him to make an appointment with a sports dietitian.

Tony was pleasantly surprised to discover that the sports dietitian had a wealth of knowledge regarding supplements, timing of food intake, the best combination of foods and fluids for competition and issues worth considering to optimise recovery following exercise. After visiting the sports dietitian, Tony made some major changes to his competition intake.

These included:

- Having a pre-competition meal that was carbohydrate-rich, moderate to low in fibre, and low in fat. Tony now opts for a liquid meal supplement, three slices of toast - one with Vegemite, one with a banana and one with jam. To add some extra fluid, he also includes a large glass of juice, slightly diluted with water.
- Rather than exclusively using water during a day of racing, Tony has started using a sports drink as well. He finds he doesn't like the sticky feel in his mouth when using a sports drink, so usually sips on water during the last half hour before a race. Immediately following his race, Tony aims to drink 200-300 ml of sports drink.
- Tony decided he needed to introduce a couple of other snacks in addition to barbeque shapes. He has introduced cereal bars, fruit buns, fruit and nut mixes, crackers with Vegemite, creamed rice and sports bars. Tony has found that sports bars are excellent straight after a race as they can easily be carried all over the beach in his back pocket.
- After consulting with his sports dietitian, Tony has been more strategic with how he spends his money on supplements. He now only buys liquid meal supplements, sports bars and sports drinks.

