

Protein Drinks: Will They Improve Your Performance in a Race?

Adding protein to a sports drink does not help athletes cycle faster in a 50-mile time trial, according to a study from McMaster University in Ontario (Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise, August, 2006). Many studies show that taking in a carbohydrate drink helps improve performances in athletic events lasting more than an hour. Two recent studies showed that adding protein to a carbohydrate drink improves performance even more. However, in these studies, cyclists worked at a fixed rate of effort, rather than using spurts of energy as athletes do in competition. When you compete in an athletic event lasting more than an hour, you need fluids and calories. In events lasting more than three hours, you also need salt. Calories come from carbohydrates, fats, and proteins. During highly-intense exercise, your muscles use carbohydrates more efficiently than proteins or fats. So carbohydrates are the calorie source of choice during intense exercise. Furthermore, drinks containing protein often taste bad and are not as refreshing as water, soda or sports drinks, so you don't drink as much. High-protein meals eaten immediately after hard exercise have been shown to help athletes recover faster, but the data that taking protein during exercise improves an athlete's performance is extremely weak. In competitions lasting more than an hour, athletes should take drinks that contain carbohydrates, or water plus food. In events lasting more than two hours, they also need to replace salt, either with salted drinks or with salty foods such as salted peanuts.

About the Author

The Nutrition Society promotes the science of nutrition and its application to the improvement of human and animal.

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