

## Race Day\*

From Triathlete's Edge by Marc Evans

Come race morning for events like Ironman Hawaii, it's an early wake-up call. For Dave Scott and me in 1983, it was 4:00 A.M. when I heard him and some friends outside the condominium veranda as he was warming up! Warming up is important even for an event of that distance.

### Warm-Up

Gently warming the muscles raises the metabolism by enhancing fuel breakdown and increases muscle temperature for increased muscle elasticity and circulation. The warm-up also prepares the triathlete psychologically as he readies his body, checking that all the systems are ready to go.

The duration of the warm-up depends on the athlete: In general, the greater the training volumes were leading up to event day, the longer the warm-up time will be. If you do not warm up, you undoubtedly will be slower until your muscle temperature rises and reduces cohesion and stiffness. For the most part, warm-up durations of 6 to 12 minutes in each discipline are advisable (when the weather cooperates) for competitions from the Olympic to Ironman distance. For some participants, however, warm-up may be as long as 20 to 30 minutes if the athlete noted in training that it took that long before the muscles felt fluid.

Without question, in cold-water events (even with wetsuits) I want my triathletes to stretch for at least 15 to 20 minutes and to warm up in the water. This period is vital for double-checking your ability to handle the temperature and getting your body and mind ready for a cold swim. Timing is important, because a prolonged wait before the race starts could cause a drop in the core temperature of an athlete who's left the water and is standing around waiting. Therefore, before the race, confirm the start time and ensure that your body temperature will warm up by moving about once you leave the water.

### Race-Day Nutrients

Eat your precompetition meal three or more hours prior to any Ironman event. For shorter competitions such as Olympic- and sprint-distance triathlons, a full meal may be unnecessary with the typical North American early-morning race start times. In those situations, 100 to 200 grams of carbohydrates may be all that is needed. For ultradistance events, however, a carbohydrate-rich meal with low fat and protein content is recommended. In Europe, where events often begin later in the day, you can eat a more typical breakfast, but go light on the fats and proteins.

In the first 45 minutes of the hour before the race, drink as much as 40 grams of a carbohydrate sports drink. During the last 15 minutes, drink or sip only water.

During the race, your nutrient goal should be to take in 40 to 50 grams of carbohydrates each hour. This can be in a combination of sports drinks and solid foods. The fluid goal is somewhere between 16 and 30 ounces each hour. This means ingesting 4 to 8 ounces about every 15 minutes. Natasha Badmann, 2002 Ironman world champion, showed exceptional skills and adherence to fluid intake during her marathon in Hawaii. At aid stations, she would take one cup, drink some of the fluid, then take another cup and pour it into the first, pinching the top and sipping frequently (5 or 6 times) and skillfully through the station.

Professional triathletes know very well the vital importance of fluid and food intake during competition. Most have experienced decreased endurance performance and increased HR, body temperature, and RPE when nutrients were not adequate. Just a 1 percent loss in body water results in a marked reduction in maximal oxygen capacity, so nutrients become as central to performance as training and psychological, tactical, and technical aspects.

Finally, HR monitors are unnecessary on race day, because HR by that time carries no great weight. It's likely that at no time during the year have you been as rested as you are on race day, and HR may not be a reliable indication of effort. You therefore do not want to limit your efforts or overexert yourself based on HR data that is unreliable. RPE is your best indicator of performance, because you'll compete neither too easy nor too hard by following its guidance.