

***You are what you eat ~ You race as you have trained.***

***“Consider a training diet based not on how much you can eat, but instead one where all food groups are represented and eating/training is a pleasure.”***

I think everybody can agree with the premise of the title of this article. Nutrition is a primary foundation for general health. Race performances are a reflection of what one's training has been.

Where one of my basic training principles is defined as Optimal Health, and where general nutrition is fundamental to good health, I thought it would be fun to compare common-sense general nutrition principles to training approaches.

My perspective is borne of being an athlete and professional coach seeking maximum performance, an individual who views eating as one of life's basic pleasures, and a 17-year triathlon veteran who does not view the two as being incompatible.

***A balanced diet is a healthy one.***

The benefit of eating a balanced diet is something we have heard since we were kids. As much as the billion dollar US nutrition industry would like to reinvent the wheel every year with new diet plans, the healthy eating lessons we learned as schoolchildren remain true. A balanced diet consisting of fruits, vegetables, legumes, fats, carbohydrates, proteins make for a healthy body.

A balanced approach to training encompasses a variety of *food groups*; endurance, strength, form, speed, active recovery, power. Although the relative percentages of these groups will vary depending upon the time of year, all training groups have a place at your training table.

One does not eat from only one group for months at a time while excluding other groups, an example of which would be training for months at low intensities only. Performing the same type of training day in and day out quickly becomes boring and the lack of variety results in a limited training stimulus. Also, the lack of diverse training ingredients makes this approach very time inefficient, since the only stress variable is increased volume. Lastly, such a bland method also squanders enjoyment of other *training foods* that would better contribute to your fitness.

A *nutritionally sound training program* should feature variety where no two consecutive workouts are the same. To eat and train on a monotone diet for weeks and months to build proverbial base or Ironman fitness will be a decidedly bland diet with less than optimal results.

***Feasting is a celebration of life and good health.***

Who doesn't love a 4-course meal at a fine restaurant or a holiday meal? Add a nice micro-brew with the appetizers, maybe a glass of white, and definitely a glass of red, and life can be pretty good. Yeah, wine is my weakness.

Of course it does help to sit down to such a meal hungry. It is also wise to space these meals since constant feasting tends to produce a heavy stomach, a bloated state, and a diminished appetite.

A feast is a special event reserved for special occasions and requires preparation and proper timing.

Epic training rides/run certainly form an integral part of Ironman preparation, but deserve the same respect and spacing accorded to feasts. Executing epic outings where you see your body conquering challenging distances and terrain is a celebration of burgeoning fitness and can be very intoxicating. However, these training feasts should be properly rationed such that you both find them appetizing and can digest the experience.

Constant overtraining and reliance on sheer volume of exercise as your primary training tool produces negative results similar to those caused by overeating; one's legs feel heavy, rides and runs get slower, and the joy of hitting the roads is increasingly hard to find.

***Eat in digestible amounts.***

It is not often that simply adding more of a good thing produces a better result. Think of hot dogs and being at the ballpark.

Boy, that 1<sup>st</sup> hot dog is delicious. Okay, that 2<sup>nd</sup> hot dog might taste good, but is never as satisfying as that tasty 1<sup>st</sup> dog. This negative satisfaction curve accelerates dramatically with the 3<sup>rd</sup> dog such that you might not want to eat another hot dog for months; a bad thing if your event is a hot dog eating contest.

The obvious analogy here relates to long rides/runs and training volume that is done in preparation for Ironman events. Too often I see athletes perform excessive amounts of volume-based training such that both their performance and enjoyment in these outings disintegrates. Race day approaches with a “let’s get this over with so you don’t have to do anymore of this stuff” attitude; a decidedly bad thing if your goal was an uplifting physical performance and the satisfaction that accompanies such an effort.

Endurance-volume training that outstrips an athlete’s ability to healthily absorb and digest the effort within a given workout, as well as over the course of weeks/months of training will lead to racing indigestion.

Digestibility of training is measured both in micro and macro terms.

Micro terms would mean that your power output or pace is largely maintained within a given workout. It is not useful to perform a workout consisting of 4 hours at a focused intensity, and then another 2 hours of dragging yourself home. Similarly, a run workout should see pace maintained, if not slightly increased on the return portion

Macro terms of training digestibility relate to your improvement over time. You should generally enjoy your long rides/runs and look forward to them. You should also see yourself getting both stronger and faster while doing these rides. I am always amazed at how people can see their rides getting slower and slower, but somehow think they are somehow improving!

Yes, occasional overload can be a useful training tool, but the extremity of such overload a function of one’s fitness.

However, the trend I see all too often with athletes training for IM is to perform pinnacle rides/runs months away from their events, and to then get slower and more tired as they continue to attempt similar efforts....long ride after long ride...long brick after long brick, for weeks and months.

***What does one do for a stomach-ache?***

Eat more and more of the same thing? Hardly. Plenty of liquids, soups, light meals, fruits & vegetables; are all very appetizing and helpful in restoring our stomach and body to a healthier and more restive state.

Although the above cure for a stomach-ache is pretty obvious, the Rx for an over-trained, body-depleted Ironman state is not so apparent to the motivated achiever type driven to succeed in an event like Ironman. We have all either been or seen the person who continues to ‘feed’ the body with training that is only making it sicker.

Have an Ironman tummy-ache? Instead of banging your head against the wall trying to make it right, change your training diet. Begin with a week of feel-good active recovery training where the stop-watch, HR monitor, and odometer are turned off and you allow your activity to be as your body invites, as opposed to what your mind is saying you must do.

Once your body is hungry again, consider a training diet based not on how much you can eat, but instead one where all food groups are represented and eating/training is a pleasure.

