

## Planning Race Day Nutrition for Ironman

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It's competition season and your Ironman race is fast approaching. Your physical training program is progressing nicely as you put in mile after mile but one thing may still have you confused: your race day nutrition plan. It is very common for athletes to either forget about their nutrition until the last few days before the event or have no idea the large impact it can make on the day of an Ironman race.

This article will provide you some outside the box nutrition information as you develop your Ironman race day nutrition plan. Remember, any nutrition plan should be implemented in training months before the actual race to determine if your body's digestive system will agree or if you must go back to the drawing board!

### Tip #1: Beware of the blood shunting response

Many athletes will try their normal training nutrition plan during longer aerobic training sessions and while this is okay to a certain extent, it is important to remember that the gut will respond differently when the intensity of exercise increases. Specifically, there is a blood shunting response which means that during higher intensity exercise, more blood is directed to the working muscles so more oxygen can be delivered to support locomotion. This means less blood in the gut and thus when you try to eat something when pushing the pace a bit, your body responds negatively and you will either feel like you are going to throw-up or you must slow the pace down to redirect the blood flow back to the gut to process any calories you have consumed.

The solution involves not overfeeding your body with calories during exercise so the body is not confused regarding where the blood should go. Read the next tip to learn how to do this.

### Tip #2: Develop metabolic efficiency

You have likely heard of the concept of metabolic efficiency but if you have not, I will outline it for you in brief because it has completely changed the nutrition paradigm for Ironman athletes. Metabolic efficiency is the ability of the body to use the nutrients it has stored, specifically carbohydrate and fat.

The body has extremely limited stores of carbohydrate (enough to fuel about 2-3 hours worth of moderate intense exercise) but almost unlimited stores of fat. The trick is to teach your body to use more of its abundant fat stores during higher intensity exercise. By doing this, you will preserve those precious carbohydrate stores longer thus you will not need to feed much during training or racing. By lessening your body's need for supplemental calories during exercise, there is less blood shunting happening and the body (and gut) becomes much happier! Be forewarned though, like developing any type of efficiency, be it mechanical or nutritional, it takes a daily nutrition shift and about 2-4 weeks of nutrition training to begin the transformation to metabolic efficiency.

However, the rewards are bountiful as most athletes change their hourly calorie needs during an Ironman from 300-400 down to 40-120. That is music to an Ironman athlete's ears because as you learned in Tip #1, the more calories you put in your body during training, the more blood is shunted away from your gut and the incidence of GI distress is greater.

The only true way to test the waters and apply these nutrition tips is to implement a nutrition plan during training sessions that have race predicted intensity built into them. The true test becomes when your body's thermostat best simulates your Ironman race so be sure to add about 90-120 minutes of race pace during your longer bike and brick sessions to test your metabolic efficiency and how your digestive system will respond with the added intensity.

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*Bob's book, [Metabolic Efficiency Training: Teaching the Body to Burn More Fat](#), teaches athletes how to structure their nutrition and training program throughout the year to maximize their body's ability to use fat as energy and improve body composition. He also has a [Metabolic Efficiency Recipe book](#) in electronic format with over 100 metabolically efficient meals and snacks. For more information and to order the books, visit [www.fuel4mance.com](http://www.fuel4mance.com) or contact Bob at [coachbob@fuel4mance.com](mailto:coachbob@fuel4mance.com)*