What should you eat before a competition?

The following information was distributed at the USA Track & Field Level 1 Coach's Certification clinic and it was recommended that we pass the information along to you.

The three to four days leading up to an athletic event is critical for achieving success. Since tired legs tend to be the issue in the latter states of most athletic contests the benefits of proper pre-game eating can dramatically delay fatigue. *A high level of athletic performance can be maintained throughout the contest if the body is given 48- to 72-hours to properly hydrate and fuel.*

Glycogen is a form of sugar stored in the muscle and the liver. Glycogen is the main source of energy in high intensity sports. The most important consideration in a pre-event meal is to eat enough carbohydrates to refill the muscle and liver stores. Water is the other critical factor in the glycogen storage process. *The body needs water in order to store glycogen in the muscles and the liver.* The ability to produce speed and power over a period of time is dependent on how much glycogen is available to the muscles.

Meals two nights before leading up to an athletic contest should be high in complex carbohydrates and low in fat. A pre event meal should be comprised of one-third protein and two-thirds starchy foods so that glycogen storage can occur. The athlete should drink 16 ounces of fluid with each meal. In order to achieve the greatest glycogen storage, pre event eating should start two to three days prior to the contest. This high complex carbohydrate diet must be followed with a lower volume of training and intensity over the final two days to achieve the best results. If you want maximum results *waiting until the day, or night before, the contest to eat properly is too late!*

The night before the competition the athlete should eat a high carbohydrate snack and drink 16 ounces of water one hour before going to bed. Frozen yogurt, cereal bars, fruit, sorbet are all excellent snacks.

On the day of the competition the athlete should be up at least two to three hours before competition and eat at least 1 ½ hours before the event. The meal should be high in carbohydrates (waffles, pancakes, toast, breakfast shake) and 16 ounces of fluid should be consumed. Avoid orange juice, or any high acidic drink. Apple or grape juice is alkaline or 'basic' which can help reduce acid, and buffer lactic acid being dumped into your stomach.

If the competition is later in the day the athlete should try to eat four to five hours before the event. A light high carbohydrate snack can be eaten 1 to 1 ½ hours before the contest. Again, hydration is paramount; the athlete should drink 8 ounces of water thirty-minutes before the start of the event.

During longer endurance competitions, it is important to replace spent energy with easily metabolized energy sources. 'Gu' packets, or gel packs are an excellent source, so long as taken with water or diluted energy drinks. Diluted Gatorade also provides an excellent source of replenishment. Gatorade should always be drunk in ½ it's strength. If you drink Gatorade right out of the bottle it actually has the reverse effect on your body of what it is supposed to do. (Of all the sports drinks, Gatorade is the one recommended by the coaches teaching the clinic.)

Foods that are high in carbohydrates: multi-grain cereals, whole grain cereals and breads, fresh or dried fruit, low-fat yogurt, bagels, pastas, beans, fruit bars, pretzels, vegetables, rice, waffles, pancakes, toast, bread, potatoes, sweet potatoes, Gatorade sports drinks (1/2 strength), non-fat milk