

5 ways to fuel up for an obstacle-course race

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Chances are you've heard of Spartan race, Tough Mudder or Warrior Dash -- and maybe you've even done one. Obstacle course races (OCR) have become all the rage the past few years. Just last year, an estimated 4.5 million Americans participated in one, according to SportsBusiness Journal.

Whether obstacle-course races are your forte or you're toying with the idea of trying one for the first time, you'll want to fuel up differently than you do for a typical race.

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Bob Seebohar's perfect prerace breakfast

You want to eat two to three hours before your race.

Breakfast mash

2 tablespoons natural, crunchy peanut butter

1/2 cup plain Greek yogurt
1-2 teaspoons chia seeds
1/2 cup blueberries or a medium banana

In this meal, you get carbs from the yogurt, peanut butter, blueberries and banana, and you get your protein and fat from the yogurt, peanut butter and chia seeds. It's a great dish for balancing blood sugar too.

We spoke with Bob Seebohar, MS, RD, CSSD, a sports dietitian, exercise physiologist and owner of eNRG Performance in Littleton, Colorado, about the ins and outs of OCR nutrition. Here are his tips for maintaining your energy from start to finish.

Balance your prerace meal

Everyone is different when it comes to fueling before a race. Some people can have solid foods and be fine, while others need only liquids so they don't upset their stomachs.

"Whether you choose to go with solids or something like a smoothie, you must have a good source of carbs, a slightly lower source of protein and an even lower source of fat," said Seebohar, who is also the nutrition coach for Clif Bar.

Think 50 percent carbs, 30 percent protein and 20 percent fat.

"You could have anything from oatmeal with protein powder and some nut butter to a smoothie (for those with a more sensitive stomach) that's fruit based, with unsweetened almond milk, coconut oil and protein powder," he said.

Eat your normal food all week

Anything you eat, from the time it enters the body until it exits, takes about two to three days to pass, Seebohar said. That means if you're racing on a Saturday, something you ate on Wednesday or Thursday can wreak havoc on you on race day if you aren't used to it.

"Don't do anything extremely different from your typical meal plan, like eating foods you never have before a race," says Seebohar. "If you're traveling, try your best to replicate your normal eating patterns. You may just have to up the amount and density of your portions."

Plan for longer distances

Whether your race is 3 miles or 8 miles or 13-plus makes a big difference in your fueling plans. With a short race, a good breakfast and water are all you'll need. But you'll need more if you're on the course for several hours.

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"For a longer race, after every two to two-and-a-half hours, you need to be thinking, 'OK, now I need more calories,'" Seebohar said.

Because of the heart-rate spikes caused by obstacles, you'll burn through more energy than you would in a steady race such as a half-marathon, so plan to consume 80-100 calories an hour.



What to eat when you're midrace? "I think gummies are great because they're easily digestible and individual," Seebohar said. "Unlike a gel, where you have to consume the whole pack at once and generally cut it with water because it has a higher carb concentration, gummies allow you to partition calories more approximately."

Remember to hydrate

Each race is different, but normally, you should be drinking enough so you're going to the bathroom every two to three hours, Seebohar said.

"It's extremely important that it becomes a part of the cognitive process a couple days before the race," he said. "Ask yourself, 'Am I carrying my water bottle?' and even the morning of, be sure you're drinking water."

Replenish the nutrients you sweat out

Not only is it important to remember your carbs, protein and fat, but you also need to be getting your full electrolyte panel: sodium, calcium, magnesium and potassium. It's key to replenish these along the route as well.

"If you have a higher sweat rate, chances are you're probably losing more sodium," Seebohar said. "Some races will have a water station with an electrolyte formula in the water, but otherwise, take an electrolyte capsule to help replenish what you lose in sweat and avoid cramping."