HEALTHFUL EATING on the road

BY KATIE NAVARRA

How much time and money do you invest in planning your horse's diet to help him achieve success in the show ring?

You source the highest quality hay, select a well-balanced grain ration, opt for supplements and in some cases add electrolytes to his water. When it's time to hit the road for a show, all of these components are carefully packed and made available throughout the event.

Why? Because good nutrition and hydration is critical to success in the show pen.

In contrast, how much time and effort do you spend planning the food you'll consume at a horse show? Chances are, far less than the time spent on your horse.

"While it's important to take care of your horse, it's equally important to make sure that you're well prepared too," said Barbara Lewin, RD, CSSD, LD a Sports Nutritionist who works with professional and Olympic athletes and founder of sports-nutritionist.com.

Grueling show schedules leave little time for meals. It's easy for trainers, grooms and exhibitors alike to get caught up in pre-dawn grooming regimens and midnight schooling rides. The hectic schedule provides an easy excuse for fast food or no food at all. Glucose, which comes from the food you eat, supplies the brain with energy. Missing meals and poor food choices affects the amount of glucose available to the brain which zaps energy and clouds focus.

"The brain relies on glucose as a fuel source. It's important for attention and mental acuity, and especially for dealing with challenging mental tasks like that found in competition," she said.

Learn how eating healthfully at a show can be easy and convenient.

PLAN AHEAD

Set aside time in your pre-show schedule to plan and pack food for yourself. Whether you're packing a small cooler for a one-day show or stocking up the trailer's living quarters for a multi-day or week-long jaunt, there are plenty of healthy, quick meal solutions to keep you energized.

Pack lean meats and nut butters to make sandwiches for quick, easy to transport meals. "A turkey sandwich or an almond butter and banana sandwich are small, portable meals, packed with protein and energy" Lewin explained.

Snacking in between meals sustains energy levels. A home-made trail mix combining nuts, seeds, dried fruit and dried cereal tossed together is one option. A piece of fruit and/or hummus with crackers are another alternative. In recent years, energy bars have become popular, but Lewin cautions against them.

"Only use energy bars to fill in gaps when you don't have access to real food and want to avoid the vending machines or fast food stands," she said.

When choosing energy bars, look for options that are lowest in fat and sugar, but that contain good amounts of carbohydrates and moderate amounts of protein. "Kind Bars and Cliff Bars are two examples that meet these criteria," she said.

Include salty foods, like pickles and olives, to replenish the salt lost through perspiration. "There is a connotation that salt is bad, and it's not," Lewin said, "while the average person may get too much sodium, this is not usually the case with a more active and health conscious person."

Sports drinks are popular choices for replacing electrolytes lost through exertion. Though some brands are beginning to reduce the preservatives and artificial colors in the drinks, not all have. Choose drinks that contain as few artificial ingredients as possible. For a healthy alternative, try Lewin's recipe highlighted in the sidebar.

Competition day is not the best time for trying new foods. "Instead, stick with food choices that you are familiar with and know that you tolerate," she cautions.

FUEL UP

Preparing your body for competition begins the night before the event. Eating a meal that includes lean protein such as wild caught fish, chicken, beans or lentils and complex carbohydrates such as sweet potatoes, rice and pasta along with steamed vegetables or salads preloads the body with energy for upcoming exertion. A well-balanced meal the night before should be followed by a good breakfast the morning of the show.

"Breakfast is literally breaking a fast," Lewin explained, "glycogen stores will be low in the morning, so it's really important to eat something that will sustain you."

Oatmeal with fruit and nuts or whole grain toast with egg whites are good sources of energy to carry you through the day. Quick cooking oats and recipes for overnight oatmeal are transportable and ready in a hurry when you're rushing to get the day started.

Maintaining energy levels is as important as preloading. Eating regular meals throughout the day and snacking as your schedule allows helps your body maintain consistent energy levels for mental sharpness.

Avoid concession stands or nearby fast food restaurants when possible. Fried foods are quick and are comfort foods for stressful situations. Unfortunately, these foods are highly processed and are loaded with fat, sodium and sugar.

"These foods are not good energizers," Lewin cautioned, "They will often leave you feeling sluggish and craving the next fast food."

HYDRATION

Consuming water throughout the day is as important as food choices.

"Oftentimes we restrict fluids because it's not convenient to be looking for the restrooms," Lewin said.

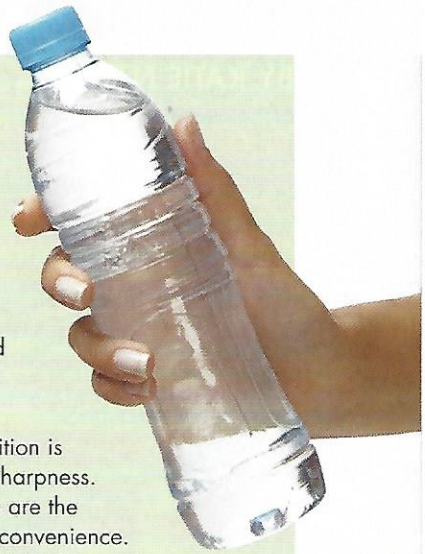
Drink as much water as possible while avoiding sodas, sweet drinks and caffeinated beverages, especially if caffeine makes you nervous or jittery. "It's better to choose water with some lemon and add a natural sweetener such as stevia," she adds.

A good rule of thumb is to try and drink the equivalent of half your body weight in ounces of water each day. So, if you weigh 150 pounds, work towards consuming 75 ounces of water to stay hydrated.

FOR THE BEST RIDE

When time is tight and nerves make your stomach jittery, it's tempting to skip meals and avoid drinking. Withholding much needed nourishment from your body can affect your focus and thwart your efforts in the show pen.

The properly fueled and hydrated body is an amazing machine-capable of breaking barriers and beating out the best in competition," she concluded.



DRINK UP

By Katie Navarra

Hydration is as important as eating well. "The human body is composed of 60 percent water," said Barbara Lewin, RD, CSSD, LD a Sports Nutritionist who works with professional and Olympic athletes and founder of sports-nutritionist.com.

Staying hydrated during competition is essential to maintaining mental sharpness. Often, store bought sports drinks are the drink of choice because of their convenience. "Most of these drinks have artificial colors and flavors," Lewin cautioned.

As an alternative, she encourages clients to use her All-Natural Sports Drink recipe included below.

Next time you're headed to a show, pre-mix a batch to take with you for the day or stockpile your trailer's living quarters for a rejuvenating energy boost on the road.

ALL-NATURAL SPORTS DRINK

- 3½ cups cold water
- ¼ cup orange juice
- ¼ cup pure maple syrup
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1/8 teaspoon salt

Instructions

- Mix all ingredients together
- Yield: 1 quart

Per 8 oz Portion: 60 calories, 15 g carbohydrate, 0 g protein, 0 g fat, 0 g fiber, 75 mg sodium, 115 mg potassium

When eating a full meal isn't an option, regular snacking can help athletes maintain much-needed energy levels. Fries and other greasy foods from the show concession stand can be tempting. Unfortunately, these processed foods only provide short bursts of energy that are often followed by energy crashes.

"These foods will often leave you feeling sluggish and craving the next fast food," said Barbara Lewin, RD, CSSD, LD a Sports Nutritionist who works with professional and Olympic athletes and founder of sports-nutritionist.com.

Instead of opting for junk food, pack these snacks that Lewin recommends for maintaining energy levels.

- Pickles
- Olives
- Hummus and crackers
- Fruit
- Homemade trail mix that includes a combination of nuts, seeds and dried fruit and dried cereal, tossed together