Nutrition and your preparation

Not only is physical preparation and training key to successfully completing one of our challenges, but your nutrition, what you eat and drink to fuel you through a day's long walk is just as important.

When you take part in an event you'll know that your meals have been designed by a nutritionist specifically for your challenge and then made by professional caterers, so you don't have to worry about what is good fuel for your body.

The energy that you'll need for our challenges is affected by a number of factors, namely, your body weight, age, gender and total height gain of your day's walk. Your muscles are going to be placed under strain and will need both plenty of carbohydrates and fatty acids to keep you going, otherwise you'll find yourself having to slow down to complete the challenge. Good food can also give you a morale booster to keep you going, to complete and to enjoy your expedition.

Preparing for a full day walking

Before setting of on a full day or multiple days challenge it is important to prepare your body and ensure your carbohydrate stores are as full as possible. The night before your challenge you should be eating large portions of wholemeal pasta or rice dishes with a tomato or vegetable sauce (rather than meat or cheese based sauces)

On the morning of your challenge breakfast should be based around getting more carbohydrates into your body, ideally about an hour before you're due to start walking. There are plenty of breakfast foods high in carbohydrates:

- Wholemeal toast with honey, jam or marmalade
- Bagels
- Porridge cooked with raisins and banana to sweeten
- No added sugar muesli (brands with dates, dried apricots for sweetness)
- Stewed apples and prunes with natural yoghurt

Fuelling throughout the day

The events will require a lot more energy than a normal day's usage, so it is important to take high carbohydrate foods to eat during the day. Otherwise your energy stores will become depleted and you will struggle to complete your challenge. A mixture of fast and slow-releasing carbs should be taken so as to keep your energy levels up and you should be looking for foods that are light, but 'energy dense' and can easily be eaten on the go, for example, fruit cake, malt load, dried apricots, figs and cashew nuts.

A typical lunch for the day would include:

- Two rounds of sandwiches (e.g. cheese, tuna)
- Bar of chocolate
- Peanuts
- Some dried fruit/cereal bar
- 2 litres of water

Water the most important thing

On a typical day when you are sitting around you will use up to three litres of water in a day, half a litre from sweating, a litre from breathing and a litre and a half in urine. So as you can probably imagine the minute you undertake something physical like heading for the hills your body will use up even more water.

When we exercise our body temperature increases and is cooled and controlled by the evaporation of sweat from the body surface. An increase in your core body temperature can result in heat exhaustion, which incredibly can be reached after only 15 minutes of hard exercise if the heat is not removed from the body. Therefore, sweating throughout an endurance event is vital to prevent overheating. However, this is at a cost as large amounts of sweat bring on the threat of dehydration, which can then lead to the overheating that you were trying to avoid.

Surprisingly thirst is not a good indicator of dehydration. If you are thirsty then in all likelihood you have already lost a significant amount of fluid. So you shouldn't wait until you are thirsty to have a drink of water.

Ideally you should aim to have a drink before you set off on your walk, especially on hot days. From there you should be looking to take in around 150 – 200ml of water every 10-15 minutes during exercise. In very hot conditions you may not be able to keep pace with your fluid losses as the maximum rate of water absorption during exercise is 800ml/hour whereas your sweat rate may be as high as 2000ml/hour!

One of the best ways to check that you are drinking enough is by the volume and colour of your urine, somewhat tricky in the great outdoors. Small amounts of deep yellow pee means you need to drink more. Headaches, stomach cramps, digestive problems, side aches, diarrhoea and nausea are all possible symptoms of not drinking enough whilst you are exercising.

Refuelling the body after a day walking

During the course of a day's walking it can be difficult to get enough food and water into your body what with being on the go, that's why post walk nutrition is very important. Research shows that your body absorbs nutrients quickest within 2 hours after exercise.

It is critical that you keep your body hydrated so when you are finished you should drink 500ml of water. There are a number of sports drinks specifically designed for post-exercise consumption, with higher concentrations of protein and carbohydrates to help your muscles recover and repair in readiness for the next day.

With regards to eating you should refuel with foods high in carbohydrates to aid your recovery in the same way that you prepared your body prior to undertaking the challenge. In doing this, it replaces the glycogen stores you will need to allow your body to put in a similar performance after the first day of your challenge.

You should consume approximately 1g of carbohydrate for every kilogram you weigh within 2 hours of exercise. Then a further 1g per kilogram 2 hours later

For example if you weigh 75kg you need to absorb 75g of carbohydrates which equate to around 300 calories of food within the first two hours followed by another 300 calories 2 hours after this. 300 calories is the equivalent of three large bananas for example.