

## NUTRITION FOR SAILING

Olympic class sailing involves racing boats of varied size and weight around a set course. Racing requires acute skill, technique, physical strength and strategy to outmanoeuvre other competitors in varied wind and environmental conditions. International regattas involve racing two or more races a day over three to seven days. Racing in the Olympic Games is held over two weeks with two to three consecutive days of racing followed by dedicated “rest days”.

Sailing has been part of the Olympics since the 1900 Paris Games and over the years different sailing classes have been rotated in and out of the Games. The 2012 London Games included 10 different sailing classes including Sailboarding, Dinghy, Keelboat and Match racing. Each type of boat or sailing class involves one, two or three crew.

### Training

Training for Olympic class sailors includes “dry land” and “on water” training. Dry land training includes three to six fitness/cardiovascular sessions per week, in addition to two to four strength training sessions per week. Strength and conditioning training sessions focus on improving core strength and injury prevention. Many will also train for extensive hours (2-4+) on the water two to seven days a week. These can be technical sessions with frequent breaks to consult with the coach, or race-style sessions. The frequency of on water training will vary depending on overseas travel and time commitments.

### Competition

Australasian international regattas are scheduled annually during the summer months (October-March) with key regattas held in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and New Zealand. Some athletes will also travel to the US in the New Year to compete in Miami.

Key international and World Championship regattas are held during the Northern Hemisphere summer (April – September), predominantly in Europe. Participation in these regattas means sailing athletes can spend up to six months overseas each year.

### Physical Characteristics

The physical characteristics of Olympic class sailors will vary enormously depending on the type of class they compete in, age, gender, and crew position. While there are some undefined guidelines for recommended height and weight for each class and crew position, in general most sailors will strive for a lean, fit physique that will guarantee greater strength and stamina on the water.

Physical characteristics can also be modified depending on fitness goals as well as anticipated racing conditions. For example, at the 2008 Beijing Games, we witnessed some of the lightest

body weights of individuals and crews ever seen due to the expected light wind conditions of Qingdao.

## Common Nutrition Issues

### Training Nutrition

Most sailors juggle work or study commitments in conjunction with the demands of training and prolonged travel. Indeed the many months spent overseas can affect fitness and strength goals so the time spent “at home” typically involves more intense training blocks.

The best advice for any athlete is to plan ahead and to ensure the body is sufficiently fuelled before, during and after all training sessions. Recovery strategies that apply to other elite athletes who undertake multiple training sessions per day and over a week also apply to Olympic class sailors (refer to Recovery Nutrition under the ‘Competition and Training’ section).

Ready access to food and fluid is crucial when training on the water. Portable, nutritious options should be carried on the individual or kept on the coach boat for easy access while on the water.

Some good options might include:

- Sandwiches
- Cereal or muesli bars
- Sports bars or gels
- Fresh fruit or dried fruit and nut mix
- Sports drink

### Competition

The nutrition goal during a multi-day regatta is to start each day with a nutritious and substantial breakfast that includes carbohydrate, protein and fluid. Typically racing won’t commence until after 11am or the early afternoon, so it is important to also include a light snack one to two hours before racing.

Depending on the type of class, there will be two to three races scheduled each day that can last from 30 minutes to more than two hours each. There is usually limited time to eat or drink during and between races. Due to extra weight concerns for the boat, many athletes will rely on accessing the coach boat swiftly between races. Fluids and rapidly digested carbohydrates (such as fruit, sports bars, muesli bars, gels and even lollies) should be the focus during this time.

Refuelling is a key element in nutrition planning during a multi-day regatta with the “sail in” an optimal time to begin recovery. Nutritious, portable high carbohydrate snacks and sports

drinks are ideal. This should be followed up with a balanced evening meal including carbohydrates, protein and adequate fluids.

## Hydration

Dehydration is common in sailing due to the length of time spent on the water and subsequent exposure to environmental conditions. Even mild dehydration can impair skill and judgment on the water so strategies to minimise dehydration should be prioritised. Appropriate education can help sailors identify their individual needs in specific weather conditions and racing/training scenarios. Practical measures such as changes in body weight pre- and post-exercise, as well as day to day; and urine specific gravity (USG) are useful guides.

Athletes are encouraged to keep a water bottle handy during all training sessions and especially when on the water. Sports drinks are the ideal choice as they also provide fuel to help maintain blood glucose levels during racing. Extreme heat and environmental conditions may also warrant the use of sports drinks with higher levels of electrolytes or targeted products such as Gastrolyte.

## Travel to Overseas Countries

Sailing clubs both domestically and overseas often do not provide optimal choices so it is important for athletes to be well prepared and take preferred snacks and recovery foods with them.

Olympic class sailors begin travelling overseas from a young age so understanding how to read nutrition labels as well as shopping and cooking skills are important. During the long months spent in various European countries, most will choose to stay in self-contained accommodation which will allow greater control over food choices and meal preparation. Some food items (such as breakfast cereals, cereal/muesli bars, meal replacement powders and other sports foods) are shipped from home to provide familiar choices and more nutritious options that might otherwise be available. (Refer to the Travel section for hints and guidelines on travelling and to the “Survival” series of cookbooks).

*This fact sheet is based on National team athletes and is therefore specific to these athletes. Written by AIS Sports Nutrition, last updated February 2014. © Australian Sports Commission.*