

Pony Express District 50/20 Hike

Nutrition and Fluids Suggestions for All Hikers (2011 Update) *(Especially for Those Planning to Hike 25 or More Miles)*

Hydration and Food During the Week Leading Up to the Hike

Most long hikers end up badly dehydrated by the time they finish, even though they've been drinking during the hike. This can be a serious issue if it's a hot day. To reduce this problem, you should avoid or reduce caffeinated drinks and instead drink at least two quarts of water daily during the week before the hike, spaced throughout each day. This builds up a reserve in your body before the hike – and also helps wash out a lot of caffeine and sugar.

The heavy "carb loading," i.e., your big pasta dinner, should be eaten two nights before the hike. In this case, that would be on Wednesday night. Eat balanced, moderate meals the day and night before the hike.

Additional Meal Advice for Friday

The 50/20 Hike is similar to a marathon. Even a 20-mile hike is very strenuous if you haven't been practicing. You can help yourself a little bit with proper nutrition the day before the Hike. Some athletes believe that a moderate carbohydrate-based dinner before the event is a good strategy (such as pasta dinner, vegetables). Others believe that a balanced dinner with protein and carbohydrates is a better choice (for example, meat, rice, and vegetables). Whichever you choose, don't eat excessive amounts, eat foods that you are accustomed to eating, make healthy choices, avoid sweets such as cookies and candy, and also avoid sodas, and energy drinks.

In addition, do not eat dairy products the night before (or during) the hike. While there are a few people who can eat dairy products before a big endurance event, they are the exceptions. DON'T DO IT! This means NO PIZZA, NO CHEESE, and NO MILK!

Finally, don't eat after 7:00 pm; give your body a chance to digest before bedtime.

Advice for Friday Morning

Eat a moderate breakfast (don't start off hungry). Avoid excessively sweet foods, such as donuts, pancakes with syrup, or candy. Too much sugar can make you dizzy, nauseous and tired. Drink healthy fluids, such as water and unsweetened juice. Again, avoid caffeine drinks (sodas and energy drinks) and continue to avoid milk or other dairy products.

Fluids During the Hike

Even though water and sports drinks will be available at the Support Stops, each hiker must have a water bottle, should drink continuously while hiking, and should re-fill the bottle at each station before continuing on the Hike. To repeat, the most critical concern for anyone involved in this activity is proper hydration! You need to drink a lot of water both before starting and during the hike. The body loses fluids through sweating and

breathing, and replacement is essential. Yes, you still sweat even if it's raining or very cold outside, and you also continuously lose moisture by breathing – especially in very nice (dry) weather. Drink before you become thirsty. If you wait until you are already thirsty, you are already dehydrated and will very likely have a much more difficult time reaching your intended goal. Dehydration will not only hinder your performance (you will get tired, walk slower, might get cramps), but it might lead to serious complications, especially in hot weather. Drinks that do a good job keeping you hydrated are water, sports drinks (these are far better diluted one-to-one with water), and diluted unsweetened fruit juices.

However, avoid carrying a big hydration bladder like a Camelbak with a gallon of water in it. A gallon of water weighs 8 pounds, not counting the weight of the hydration bladder. That is a lot of weight to carry, when all you really need is a liter or so between stops. You don't have that far to go between stops. Be smart about it.

Food During the Hike

The following foods are recommended during the hike (all of which you should try on training hikes):

- * Bagels
- * Bananas, apples, oranges, and other ripe, fresh fruits.
- * Gel/GU (only if you have tried this before on training hikes)
- * Power Bars (only if you have tried this before on training hikes)

You can eat “regular” foods, and you probably should if that's what you ate all week long prior to the hike. However (and again), avoid sweets unless you're having a blood sugar crisis, and even then be restrained. Most successful long-distance hikers eat a small amount almost continuously while hiking, as opposed to eating a pile of food at each rest stop and then nothing between the stops. That's a good strategy for everyone.

Good Luck! Hike On!