



# Snack facts

You won't find Powerbars at a café or pub stop. So what's the best normal food for refuelling your ride? **Joe Beer** examines your options

**S**topping at café for something to eat and drink is one of the pleasures of a day out on the bike. Village shops, meanwhile, can provide emergency energy if you find yourself in the back of beyond without enough snacks in your jersey pocket to get you home. When you're hungry *anything* is tempting, but some choices will fuel the rest of your ride much better.

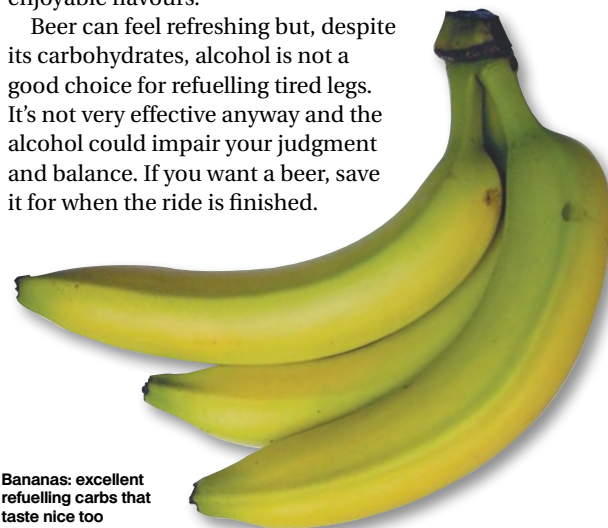
If we look at what your muscles are doing it can make the choices a bit easier. As you pedal, carbohydrate and a small amount of fat is converted into movement. In

the process you make heat, which your body gets rid of by evaporating sweat. The stuff you eat and drink out on a ride should aim to replace carbohydrates, water and some of the nutrients lost in sweat.

## BACK TO BASICS

Sports nutrition products do a great job in certain scenarios but traditional foods work too. The classic cyclist's snack of beans on toast is a good choice because it has carbohydrate in several forms, it is fairly low fat (if you go easy on the butter), it includes sodium (which is lost in sweat) and it is easy to digest whether it's hot or cold outside. But we cannot all live on beans on toast at every refuel. Instead, you could have a fruit salad, heavy on the bananas; tea with a couple of low-fat cakes; even a simple scrambled eggs on toast. The point is this: look for foods high in carbohydrate, for liquids that refresh you, and for some subtle but enjoyable flavours.

Beer can feel refreshing but, despite its carbohydrates, alcohol is not a good choice for refuelling tired legs. It's not very effective anyway and the alcohol could impair your judgment and balance. If you want a beer, save it for when the ride is finished.



Bananas: excellent refuelling carbs that taste nice too

## SEVEN STEPS TO BETTER SNACKING

1. In warmer weather you may be hungry but you should try to get liquids (e.g. tea, orange squash, cola diluted 50/50 with water, cold milk shake) into the system first to get you hydrated. Then follow it up with some solid options.
2. The shorter the distance you have left to ride the more you can eat, though it's always best to see café stops as snacking opportunities not a four-course meal.
3. Your body needs high carbohydrate foods (e.g. bread/toast, breakfast cereals, jacket potatoes, low-fat cakes, bananas). It's not time to stock up on fatty foods loaded with hydrogenates and saturates, such as fried food, fatty cakes/desserts, and high-fat flapjacks.
4. Stay off hard-to-digest large protein sources like steak. Small amounts of protein can be added to sandwiches to aid recovery and slow the food digestion. But try these incrementally rather than suddenly upping your protein food intake.
5. Say off the booze. Wait until you finally stop for the day then have a well-earned pint. Don't drink-and-ride. By contrast, caffeine-based drinks can be used to lift your riding speed and energy level.
6. Don't avoid eating entirely because you are trying to lose weight. A small snack will allow you to ride faster/longer once back on the bike and reduce your chances of hunger knock. You will also be less likely to pig out once home.
7. Different foods will be favoured by different cyclists. Pick something else off the menu to vary your nutrition intake but also to find what works best for you. What are your co-riders tucking in to?



Left: Jonny Gawler; right: Dan Joyce

Better options for quenching your thirst are soft drinks such as orange squash or even cola. Tea and coffee can give you a psychological and physical lift through the effects of the warmth of the drink and the well-known kick that caffeine gives. If you do want a caffeine kick, the benchmark can of Red Bull, strong coffee or Coca Cola can all make the second half of the day feel slightly easier. While caffeinated drinks are diuretic, any fluid loss is more than offset by the volume of liquid that you're drinking. Drinking tea or coffee during a ride is fine.

In yesteryear high protein foods were seen as ideal cycling fuel. Steak before rides was all the rage. This was a case of bad information driving bad decisions. You do not need massive amounts of protein – roughly 1-2 grams per day per kilogram of bodyweight is enough. Small amounts of protein can aid recovery, slow the speed of digestion, and give you a wider range of foods to chose from mid-way through a ride. Avoid fatty pies or big lumps of red meat. Instead, consider scrambled eggs on toast, a ham sandwich or a milk shake.

#### **VARIETY IS THE SPICE**

It's impossible to list a mid-ride menu for all people for all conditions. Tastes vary. The key things are to go for snacks that are low in fat, high in carbohydrate and to avoid alcohol completely. It's worth trying different foods from time to time just so that your menu of options for future refuelling stops gets broader.

Stopping at a café on a bike isn't like stopping at a petrol station when you're in a car. It's about pleasure as much as it is about practical requirements. Choose right, however, and you will get back on your bike with renewed vitality and a great recommendation for others you next time you stop. Get it wrong and your legs can start to wilt and your stomach feel uncomfortable.