

Module 10, Lesson 10 Handout:

Carb Cycling Basics

Carb cycling is a relatively new practice among athletes. Even though there isn't a whole lot of research on the benefits of carb cycling, there's anecdotal evidence that for some athletes it works to improve athletic performance and body composition. There are claims that carb cycling helps promote muscle growth, reduces insulin sensitivity and aids with recovery, but again, the science isn't conclusive.

How Does it Work?

Carb cycling is just what it sounds like. People restrict their carbohydrates in various amounts over days, weeks or months. Usually, people eat more carbs the day before or on the days when they're training heavily or have an event so that energy is readily available for the muscles during training or events and recovery. Then on the in-between days when you don't need the immediate availability of energy you eat fewer carbohydrates. Amounts of protein and fat can be adjusted to compensate for the lack of carbohydrate on the low carbohydrate days, but there are also carb cycling methods where protein and fat intake stay relatively consistent, so calories are cycled too and you're eating less food overall on the "off days." The exact formula is going to depend on the individual athlete.

This diet is more complex than counting macros, which is more complex than counting calories, which is more complex than following a meal plan template. All in all, carb cycling is not straightforward to put into practice. It really takes more time to understand than most diets, so reserve this eating plan only for clients it may truly have a very specific benefit. Also note that since there isn't a lot of research in this area, much of this is going to trial and error with finding what works best for the individual.

Example Carb Cycling Plan

The exact formula to follow is going to depend on the person's specific training schedule and their sport, and some trial and error with what works best for the specific person. It's totally okay to tweak the plan as the person tries it out and brings back his feedback. Here is an example of what it may look like:

Example Client: Male endurance cyclist training for a long distance cycling event

Day	Training	Carbohydrate Amount
Sunday	Rest Day	Low
Monday	Endurance Ride	Moderate
Tuesday	Ride and Weight Training	High
Wednesday	Endurance Ride	High
Thursday	Rest Day	Low
Friday	Endurance Ride	Moderate
Saturday	Ride and Weight Training	High

Sample Menus

Low Carbohydrate Day (Rest Day)

Breakfast

- 3 eggs scrambled in grass fed butter with cup of spinach
- Cup of berries
- Coffee with whole milk

Snack

- 2 tablespoons hummus
- Bowl of raw veggies

Lunch

- 8 oz. grilled salmon over mixed greens
- ½ avocado
- 2 tablespoons vinaigrette

Snack

- 2 oz. turkey jerky
- 2 hard boiled eggs

Dinner

- 8 oz. grass fed sirloin steak
- Roasted broccoli and cauliflower
- Side salad with 1 tablespoon vinaigrette

Moderate Carbohydrate Day

Breakfast (Pre-Training Meal)

- 2 slices Ezekiel bread, toasted
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter
- 1 banana, sliced
- Coffee with whole milk

Snack (Post-Training Snack)

- 6 oz. full fat Greek yogurt
- ¼ cup sliced almonds
- 1 cup pineapple

Lunch

- 1 cup lentil soup
- 1 slice sourdough bread with ½ avocado, mashed and 1 hard boiled egg, sliced
- Roasted Brussels sprouts

Snack

- 2 tablespoons hummus
- Bowl of raw veggies
- 4 or 5 whole grain crackers

Dinner

- 6 oz. tuna steak
- 1 cup farro

- Broiled asparagus with olive oil and sea salt
- Side salad with 1 tablespoon vinaigrette

High Carbohydrate Day

Breakfast (Pre-Training Meal)

- 1 sprouted grain bagel
- 2 tablespoons almond butter
- 1 cup fruit salad
- Coffee with whole milk

Snack (Post-Training Snack)

- 1 cup cooked oatmeal
- ¼ cup chopped walnuts
- 1 cup strawberries

Lunch

- 1 large whole wheat tortilla
- ½ cup brown rice
- ½ cup black beans
- 3 oz chicken
- 2 tablespoons guacamole
- Salsa

Snack

- Lara bar
- Apple

Dinner

- 1 1/2 cups whole wheat pasta
- 6 oz. grilled shrimp
- 1 tablespoon pesto
- 1 cup roasted broccoli w/ 2 teaspoons olive oil and garlic
- Whole grain roll