

Race day

This is what you need to know & what you should do before a race.

1: Never do anything new.

Race day is not the time for a new boat/paddles, new food or drinks, new clothing, or anything else you haven't done or used in several training sessions. Stick with what works for you (even if it's different to everyone else). Eventually develop a routine that you follow ritualistically before all your races.

This also includes new race plans, tactics etc. By all means try new things in training and build up races, but never in the **big** race. Don't forget this includes your normal warm up routine.

2: Eat first thing.

Too many racers skip breakfast on race day, having just a cup of tea/coffee and/or some sports drink. You need more than that. From the time you go to bed until the start of the race is hopefully 8 to 10 hours. In that time, your energy stores get depleted and you get dehydrated. If you don't have a simple, high-carb breakfast, you're setting yourself up to fail. Bananas, brown toast/bagels, or porridge are good choices. If nerves are stopping you eating your normal amount, then little and often is better than nothing. Stop eating at least an hour before the race – remember don't do anything new.

3: Have adequate rest.

Get a decent **week's** sleep, remember you might be nervous the night before the race, so you need all the rest you can get, especially if you're racing abroad with all that travelling, also you're sharing a small airtight container (plane/train/coach) for hours with 200+ strangers. You need to be well rested & healthy before the trip.

Stop intense trainings at least 2 days before the big race (you should still do light exercise and this is down to the individual and their coach) to give your body enough time to recover and recharge before the race (this isn't true of shorter races or those used as training). Having enough rest means less sign of fatigue and anxiety or stress, allowing the body and brain to perform at their best. This is particularly true of teenagers.

4: Low Carbs?

Forget the low carbo and high protein diet (shakes!). We are not training for body building. You need carbs to give you the energy you need in a race. A protein-based diet will not provide you enough energy, and energy from protein-based diets are usually deprived of the fats needed. (for example, chicken & steak).

There are also bad and good carbs.

Examples of good carbs food:

- Potatoes (boiled-jacket)
- Bananas
- Rice - brown

Bad carbs are (simple sugars):

- Sweets
- Soft drinks
- Cakes/biscuits

5: Water for thought

Replenish your body fluid the week leading up to the event and not the night before you head to bed. Drinking plenty of water before you sleep will equip your body with enough fluid for you to

perform at your maximum hydrated state. Two - three hours before the start of the race, hydrate yourself further with diluted isotonic drinks (max 30% isotonic sports drink, 70% water. **Not** energy drinks!). The reason for diluting the sports drinks is most have a high sugar content which are meant to deliver quick energy but often these drinks will end up causing you to be even more thirsty. You can end up drinking more and getting yourself bloated. Get used to drinking and how much you can drink in the race/regatta without negative effects, bloating, stitches or needing the loo before you race. Good drinks should contain minerals such as sodium & potassium. You can buy powdered forms of sports drink from sports shops/supermarkets etc. and mix your own diluted cocktail! They do not have to be expensive and always try them beforehand in training. Rehydration is very important post training and post-race to maximise recovery, semi skimmed milk is better than a sugary sports drink. Long distance performance is dramatically affected by hydration levels.

6: Vitamins.

Vitamins helps to keep the body in good condition. Vitamins like C & E are anti-oxidants. They not only help in repairing the body but give good effects too. As you train/race, you take in more oxygen, which creates oxidants, which causes harm to you over time (damaging of cells resulting in aging). Anti-oxidants helps prevent this. However, a good balanced diet with fruit and vegetables is enough and you should never overdose on expensive multi vitamins as your body cannot process them in such quantities and well just pass them out. Fruit-juice is also another source of vitamins too but is high in simple sugars even if they are natural.

7: Caffeine for endurance?

I would never recommend excessive caffeine use, as a stimulant it effects people in different ways and impacts sleep.

Some sports drink contains 50-100mg of caffeine, this is going to affect behaviour and is a bad idea in pre-adult athletes. Energy drinks are **not** for athletes.

8: Race plans

Remember **Never** do anything new... So, this is hugely contentious, but remember this is a **race** and not a time trial, do you react to events which are outside your plan? Should you? "You have to be in it to win it" there is so much conflicting advice.

There are three types of racing: giving pressure, receiving pressure and racing your own race.

I'm going to say you can/should have a plan in "Sprint races" which is practised in training repeatedly, so you know it works for you individually and you can build confidence and the mental toughness to execute **your** plan. Simplistically you have two options (with more complexity tailored to your strengths and weaknesses). "Go 'til you blow" living in the race for as long as you can as hard as you can.

Or a more measured plan, strokes per distance/even pace etc. you must find what works for you and practice before the big race.

Never use a plan you haven't tried before!

Marathon/5K, you **MUST** react to what is going on around you. You can have set plans for certain situations, "what I'd do in this situation" but it is a race and therefore it is fluid and constantly changing. Depending on what your chosen outcomes are, you must practice these scenarios. Racing to win can be very different to racing to stay with a faster group for as long as possible.

9: Race day reflection

Race day should reflect what you have already done in training, you need your training to put you in the same physical and emotional stressed situations. Afterwards you must honestly assess your performance, what went well, what went wrong and what would you do differently next time?

There is little point in correct preparation without measuring its usefulness. Don't change for changes sake but be prepared to change what doesn't "feel" like it works for you. Get honest

feedback from others to temper your enthusiasm or disappointment. Assess your performance a few days later to stop knee jerk reactions.

10: Get there on time

This may sound obvious, but you need to get to the race with the least amount of emotional stress possible. Your body reacts to emotional stress in the same way as physical stress. Rushing around because you didn't know where the start was/toilets/carpark/check in or what your race number or lane is, is going to affect your performance. This is just as true at a closed regatta course as a domestic Marathon. This is even more true on international trips when food is not always served when you need it, multiple buses from the hotel to the venue etc. Take ownership of **your** race and get involved – don't just let it happen to you.

11: Check your equipment

Usually your boat has travelled to a race, many an international medal has been lost to a rudder failure! Boats vibrate on cars or on squad trailers, check the footrest, the T-Bar and the rudder. Make sure you still have buoyancy and very importantly especially on big trips, that you have your paddles! It's very easy to pick up a paddle bag from a big pile and realise yours are at the hotel and you're at the race venue! Also check you strapped/bungeed it down after the race when you are tired!!

12: If you want to get good at racing, go racing

It sounds obvious but the above is very true. You have people who are very good at training and you have people who are racers and the exceptional few do both.

If you want to get good at racing either sprint or marathon, you must do those races as often as possible. Even if you think you are no good at regattas, they are very hard and good training.

Marathons are not steady state time trials, they are sprints, endurance efforts, technique sessions and mental training. Find what you enjoy in them and keep doing it.

13: Enjoy your racing

Lastly and most importantly you need to enjoy what you do. This isn't always easy when it means so much to you, all the hard work, hours put in and expectations of others... but you must enjoy your training and racing (you can feel nervous, scared etc. that's ok) but to do your very best you need to be in a happy state of mind and an athlete who isn't enjoying the racing or training is NOT going to perform as well as they could.

If you are struggling for enjoyment or motivation speak to people you trust or respect. Do some fun racing or reassess your goals, are they realistic and achievable or are you spoiling the sport you loved?