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Research gives thumbs up to potatoes as performance fuel

Independent university [research](#) has shown potato purée is on par with popular concentrated carbohydrate gel products as fuel for high performance athletes such as cyclists.

The University of Illinois research shows potato ingestion during prolonged cycling is as effective as carbohydrate gels to support exercise performance in trained athletes.

Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD), Dr Jane Watson said the research results were great news for Australian athletes as potatoes were an inexpensive, readily available and easily digested source of energy.

“We know ingestion of concentrated carbohydrate gels during prolonged exercise can promote carbohydrate availability and improve exercise performance,” Dr Watson said.

“This study expands and diversifies race fuelling menus for athletes by providing an evidence-based wholefood alternative to the routine ingestion of gels during training and competition.”

Dr Watson said potatoes could maintain blood glucose concentration, facilitate gastric emptying, and support performance which was a great outcome for high performance athletes.

“Athletes have long looked to carbohydrates as a race fuel to improve endurance performance and the ideal food should be readily digested and absorbed,” she said.

“Potatoes fit the bill, and this is great news for athletes and the nutritionists and dietitians advising them.”

The research team studied competitive athletes in three separate cycling trials. At 15-minute increments during each two-hour trial, the athletes consumed either baked potato puree, a commercially available carbohydrate sports gel product or water.

The total portions of potato and gel each contained 120 grams of carbohydrates. The research team collected information such as oxygen uptake, blood glucose and lactate concentrations, heart rate, body temperature and perceived exertion throughout the trials.

During the cycling trial, the athletes rated gastrointestinal symptoms such as abdominal pain, gas or bloating.

The researchers found potatoes were a promising alternative for athletes because they represented a cost-effective, nutrient-dense and wholefood source of carbohydrates. They also offer a savoury race fuel option compared to the high sweetness of carbohydrate gels.

For evidence-based information about the nutritional value of potatoes including a fact sheet on the glycemic index, visit the Aussie Potatoes website www.aussiepotatoes.com. To access the research paper, visit <https://journals.physiology.org/doi/full/10.1152/jappphysiol.00567.2019>.



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