

## Getting started

- Sit down and set up a schedule where you can incorporate time to train for your challenge and start training as soon as possible.
- The importance of training for your challenge cannot be stressed enough. This means you will need to make choices, set priorities and optimise training time.
- To get a maximum enjoyment out of your challenge you should consider following a personal training plan. The first stage in putting together your own training plan must be an initial assessment of your current physical condition. Ask yourself these questions:
  - Do I undertake any physical activity/activities on a regular basis to build strength and endurance?
  - Do I have any physical limitations that will require special attention while I train for my upcoming challenge?
  - What is the longest cycle ride that I could undertake now with relative comfort?
- Whatever your physical condition, the key to enjoying your challenge is to build up your stamina.
- If you are a stranger to exercise, we recommend that you train slowly.
- Regardless of your fitness level, we recommend not to increase your training by more than 10-20% a week. And remember to stretch before and after each training session.
- Please do NOT wait until the month before you leave to start training. Your body needs time to build up strength needed for your challenge and this is best achieved by training consistently over time.
- Rest is as important as time spent training. We strongly recommend that you rest at least one day per week.
- Find out if there are any good rides around your area or join a local cycling club.
- Try to get up early and cycle for 30-45 minutes between 2-4 times per week. Extend your cycle to a longer duration when you feel comfortable.
- In the months leading up to your challenge, try to leave your weekends for long training rides where you cycle 30 kilometers a day for two consecutive days.

As a guide we suggest the following 8 month training plan:

Month	Kilometers per cycle	Weekly total
1	8	16 to 24
3	12	36
5	30	90
7	60	60 to 120

You may want to consider some of the following activities when putting together your own personal training plan:

**Interval training**                      Alternate between cycling briskly for up to a minute and then returning to your original pace for a few minutes. Repeat throughout your training period.

**Aerobic conditioning**                Most of the aerobic training that you do must be on a real bike and not on a cycle machine, as the cycle machine will not adequately prepare you for the conditions that you will encounter on your challenge. Don't neglect hill training, as your challenge will consist of hills, in addition to flat grounds. Train with the shoes in which you intend to use on your challenge as this will decrease the chances of blisters on your challenge.

**Cross-training**                        Many forms of aerobic exercise can be used to help you train for your challenge, such as: running, walking, swimming, canoeing or skiing. They all use similar muscle groups to those that you will use on your challenge. Do not deceive yourself; the best training for cycling is cycling!

**Weights**                                 Improve your strength by adding weights into your training programme. Strengthen your leg and buttock muscles by using free weights or weight machines. Strengthening other muscle groups such as your abdomen, back, shoulders, chest and arms, will enhance your training.

**Chart your progress**                Keep a diary in which you log the type of exercise undertaken (distance cycled, time taken). This will help to keep you focused, motivated, honest and allow you to map your progress. Cross training adds variety and can help to alleviate the boredom associated with doing the same activity every day.

## Cycling techniques

To ensure that you are comfortable when cycling long distances, you must pay attention to your posture. Cycle correctly so you are ready for another 8-10 hours of cycling the following day.

**Remember, it is not a race** If you push yourself too hard you are likely to injure and exhaust yourself unnecessarily. It is vital to use your energy wisely. Look around you, take in and enjoy your environment using all five senses.

**Diet** There are many specially formulated sports drinks and foods offered to those training for endurance events. Certainly, a number of these are helpful in sustaining energy and you should experiment to find those that best suit your needs before your challenge. Before you start buying supplements by the caseload, look at your basic diet. Complex carbohydrates are the best source of food for your muscles (pasta, beans, rice, whole grains, fruits and vegetables). Consult with your GP if necessary. Ideally, your diet should be composed of *60% carbohydrates, 20% protein, 20% fat and PLENTY OF WATER!* As you increase the distance over which you are training, you will need to ensure that you eat well, both before and after you train. You must eat or drink a carbohydrate-rich food during the hour (ideally the 20 minutes) following a long training session. Keep a post-activity food stash handy (energy bars, sports drinks, fruits etc.) or eat a carbohydrate-rich meal. **WARNING:** Avoid training too soon after eating - your blood will be diverted to your muscles rather than being used for digestion, which is likely to lead to stomach upsets.

**Hydration** The importance of drinking enough water or sports drinks before, during and after your training cannot be stressed enough. Do not wait until you are thirsty or your mouth is dry to drink something. By then, your body is experiencing the early stages of dehydration. A good rule-of-thumb is to drink every 15 minutes, consuming at least 1 litre of water per hour while training. It is, however recommended that individuals with no specific health concerns limit the consumption of sports drink to 1 litre for every 2 litres of water consumed. We recommend that you carry the liquid that you plan to drink in a waist pack and not in your hand. Uneven distribution of weight will affect your stride and comfort over a long distance. In this respect, Camelback-type products have proven their worth. You can help your body to absorb the water that it needs by eating foods containing sodium. If you have any health concerns or are on medication, it is important that you discuss hydration and your sugar/salt intake requirement with your GP. Watch out for signs of dehydration. In this respect, fluid output is as important as the input. If you are drinking a great deal but not passing water regularly, you may find you are dehydrated. Look also at the colour of your urine (dark yellow coloured urine is a warning sign of dehydration).

Other signs of dehydration are:

- Sunken eyes
- Fatigue
- Dizziness or confusion
- Lower back pain
- Decreased urine output
- Water retention
- Headache
- Heartburn or stomach ache
- Lack of skin elasticity
- Mental irritation or depression
- Recurring or chronic pain
- Dry or sticky mucus membranes in the mouth

**Hyponatremia** The condition known as hyponatremia results from sodium loss through perspiration or from over-hydration. It is important, therefore, to drink sports drinks in addition to water while training and on the challenge itself. Water alone can cause electrolyte imbalance, as can profuse sweating. Sports drinks contain sodium, sugar and other electrolytes to counteract this. If you eat salty snacks and high carbohydrate foods (or add salt or sugar to your water) you can also help to balance your electrolyte levels. The symptoms of hyponatremia are very similar to dehydration. The effects and consequences are more severe, however, and studies have shown that women are particularly vulnerable:

- Bloating
- Confusion
- Nausea
- Cramps
- Swelling hands & forearms
- Slurred speech
- Headaches

**Injury prevention** Injuries that occur are often easily prevented - inadequate training and over-training can lead to injury, as can poorly fitted shoes and socks, poor flexibility, inadequate hydration and nutrition. A slow warm-up combined with stretching during and after can help prevent any injury. If you experience any pain or swelling, just remember R.I.C.E: (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation)

### Over training

The warning signs associated with over training includes: fatigue, low-grade fever, moodiness, irritability, decreased appetite and sex drive and increased resting heart rate. If you feel lousy but still push yourself to the limits to maintain the training schedule that you have set for yourself, you may find that you are doing yourself more harm than good. Take time off to let your body recover - you will return to your training with a renewed spirit.

### Stretching

Tight muscles hurt, perform less efficiently and are more prone to injury. In order to help improve flexibility in your muscles and joints, we recommend a thorough warm up prior to training or the challenge. While training, try to stretch regularly (stretch 5 minutes for every hour that you train). Try to make stretching a habit through your training. You will find that it will pay real dividends on your challenge. The guiding principles for stretching are outlined below:

- Always warm up prior to training - cycle slowly for 10 minutes.
- Breathe slowly with a normal rhythm.
- Hold each stretch for 15 to 20 seconds and never bounce during the stretch.
- Achieve your stretching position gently.
- Only stretch within your limits. If you feel any discomfort, stop.

### Stretching techniques

<b>The arch self-massage</b> - Use your thumb to rub the arch of each foot in a circular motion.	<b>The butterfly stretch</b> - Using your elbows, press your knees down toward the floor. This stretches your inner thighs and hips.
<b>The Achilles crouch</b> - Keeping your heel planted, lean forward into a crouching position. You're stretching the Achilles tendon, which runs down the back of the ankle to the heel.	<b>The spinal twist</b> - Cross one leg over the other extended leg, planting the foot on the floor. Twist your trunk toward the crossed leg. Switch legs and repeat on the other side
<b>The ankle roll</b> - Rotate each ankle in a circle ten times in each direction.	<b>The glute stretch</b> - Lying on your back, hug your knees toward the floor.
<b>The lunge stretch</b> - Keep your forward knee behind the forward ankle; lower your pelvis to the ground. Keep your head up, shoulders level and eyes looking forward.	<b>The seated hamstring stretch</b> - Bending at the hips, lean forward reaching your hands toward your feet. This stretches the back of your thighs and lower back.
<b>The figure '4' stretch</b> - Bring your foot to your opposite knee, making the figure '4' with your legs. Lean forward from the hips, bringing your nose to the knee. Keep your back straight to stretch the hamstrings and lower back. Reverse the leg positions and repeat.	<b>The calf stretch</b> - Using a wall, tree, or cycling partner for support, extend one foot 3 feet away from the support, with the heel firmly planted. Lean forward to stretch the calf of your extended leg, putting your weight over the bent leg. Repeat with the other leg.
<b>The quadriceps stretch</b> - Supporting yourself against a wall or tree, bend one knee, grabbing the ankle or foot. Gently pull your heel towards your bottom.	<b>The squatting stretch</b> - Keep both heels planted and lower your bottom into a squatting position; hold the position.
<b>The back stretch</b> - Reach behind your head and grasp the opposite elbow, gently pulling it back and towards the centre of your body. This stretches the triceps.	<b>The shoulder/chest stretch</b> - Interlock your fingers behind your back. Keeping your chest high and eyes looking forward gently raise your arms.

### MEDICAL PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH TRAINING

During your training and your challenge, it is important to pay special attention to your feet back and shoulders. Pamper them, soak them, massage them, and treat yourself to a professional foot/back/shoulder massage. No matter how much you look after your feet, you may still suffer from one of a number of common problems. That old adage, "prevention is better than cure", should be top of your mind.

**MOST IMPORTANTLY, HAVE FUN AND GOOD LUCK!!!**