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TUESDAY, JULY 21, 2009

Cuisine for guys who eat and ride and eat some more

They might look gaunt, even emaciated, but Tour de France cyclists must consume two to three times the daily caloric intake of the average American male to get enough fuel to finish the grueling race

BY JULIET MACUR
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, COLMAR, FRANCE



The riders about two-thirds through the Tour de France look in need of a good meal.

Many, like Garmin-Slipstream's Bradley Wiggins, have so little body fat that the veins in their arms nearly poke through their skin. Others, like Astana's Lance Armstrong, are so gaunt that their cheeks have turned concave.

Despite appearances, the riders at this three-week, 3,500km race are not starving. How could they be? Besides cycling kilometer after kilometer, eating is their second most time-consuming activity.

They eat breakfast in the morning. They snack before the race. They eat on the way to the starting line, and twice more on the road. Then they eat again as soon as they cross the finish line — before going to their hotel to snack.

Then, what do you know, they finally eat dinner, topping off their day of systematic gorging. They consume about 5,000 to 8,000 calories a day — two to three times that of an average American man. Without that fuel, they would never be able to finish this grueling competition.

"When you start to get really extreme fatigue, what tends to happen is you start to lose your hunger, your appetite," said David Millar, a British rider for Garmin-Slipstream. "Your body just starts to shut down, you can't eat. It's almost like your body is trying to get you to give up the race. When that happens, that's always a scary thing. Because when you don't eat, that's it. It's over."

With that in mind, teams like Garmin-Slipstream, based in Boulder, Colorado, have gone out of their way to keep the riders satiated, feeding them nutritious and tasty meals as well as recovery drinks, whether they want them or not. All the teams are searching for every advantage.

For Garmin, that meant hiring Sean Fowler, an American chef who runs a restaurant, El Raco d'Urza, in the Pyrenees. The team had eaten there during training sessions and hired him on the spot.

Fowler, 43, and a native of Wondervu, Colorado, has a lofty résumé. A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, he is thought to be the first American chef at the Tour de France.

"To have Sean cooking and all the fresh stuff makes a big difference," the rider David Zabriskie said. "He's even making me beets, which I like a lot. Helps move things along."

It is relatively common for teams to hire chefs for this important race. But some, including the holder of the yellow jersey for the past week, AG2R La Mondiale, still do things the old-fashioned way: they eat whatever the hotel restaurant serves. And, most of the time, that is "27-minute al dente pasta," Wiggins said. Other riders agreed.

"If you're eating the soggy French pasta, it does give your body kind of a nasty, just heavy, bad unhealthy feeling," Zabriskie said. "The way we are doing it is just one more little thing that helps."

Every day at the Tour, Fowler cooks exclusively for Garmin's nine riders, to the chagrin of team management. His sister, Laura Fowler, a schoolteacher, made the trip from Cheyenne, Wyoming, to help out.

On a typical morning, they will gather their cooking gear and take it to the motor home in which they follow the race. They make sure to arrive early at the team's next hotel, to inspect the kitchen.

If it is not up to Sean Fowler's standards for cleanliness, which has happened a few times at this Tour, he will cook in the motor home. He takes precautions to keep the riders safe from food poisoning or other gastrointestinal problems, which could be devastating to their performance. In his motor home, he wields utensils and pots and pans like a careful samurai because the space is cramped.

His goal is to make food both healthy and appealing to riders who can burn 4,000 calories on their bikes in

one stage — but are often too exhausted to eat.

"At this point, the riders' mental capacity goes along with their physical capacity because they are so tired," Fowler said. "It's hard to figure out what you're going to eat when you feel like that. So we decide that for them, but also give them other options, too. If they like what they are having, then they can actually get more food down."

Nearly every day, Fowler buys fresh products from a local market and makes everything from scratch. Before the Tour, he reviewed possible menu items with Allen Lim, the team's exercise physiologist. So Fowler knows exactly what foods could help the riders get through the race.

Pineapples, for instance, are good because they help the absorption of vitamins and minerals. Cherries and blueberries are good antioxidants. Almond butter is better than peanut butter because, as Lim said, "it's just a better nut."

"Most importantly, the food choices we make tend to be foods that are not inflammatory to the body," Lim said. "If you think about a big hamburger that's really greasy, that's dipped in tempura batter and deep fried, that could actually be really inflammatory. That could actually sit in your gut for a while and be hard to digest."

"A lot of food that we eat is really clean; it digests very easily. It comes into the system and actually makes the guys feel better. It might also help the rider's body heal itself faster after a difficult ride."

If the riders do not eat well, Lim said, that may translate to subpar performances on their bikes. They may not sleep well, or they may become moody. They may not recover from a workout as quickly, or feel sorer after a ride. The worst-case is that they cannot keep up with the peloton during a stage, dropping back from the pack and perhaps out of the race.

The riders do not drink many dairy or soy products, Lim said, sticking to rice milk or almond milk instead. Their diets are generally gluten free.

At meals, boxes of different cereals and bowls of fruit are strewn everywhere. At breakfast, Fowler serves items like oatmeal and plates of pasta and eggs. It is not fancy, he said, but it kicks the



Alberto Contador, above, raises his arms as he wins the 15th stage of the Tour de France on Sunday. Mark Cavendish, left, crosses the finish line to win the 10th stage of the Tour de France on Tuesday of last week.

PHOTOS: AP AND REUTERS

riders into gear.

In the team's hotels, energy bars, fruit and other snacks are lovingly set on tables in hallways or in a special room, to try to make snacking more alluring.

During the race, the riders often approach the team car to grab drinks or energy gels, or even a Coke when they need a quick jolt. Twice, they veer to the side of the road to pick up musettes, which are cloth goody bags with long handles containing energy bars and gels, rice cakes and sandwiches. Like NASCAR pit stops, but without stopping, riders grab them on the run.

After the race, the Garmin riders eat a quick meal like chicken stir-fry. For dinner, Fowler may prepare rosemary chicken or white fish served with pineapple salsa. The cyclists eat red meat occasionally. They get carbohydrates from pasta, but also from couscous and risotto to keep the menu interesting. Light desserts like fruit puree and apple cobbler are permitted.

Even all that food may still not be enough for the riders, Lim said, because their bodies still break down muscle during the Tour. The workouts are so intense, he said, that they can easily end up looking skeletal.

To keep the riders at an optimal weight, Lim weighs them before and after each stage. For him, feeding the riders is a science. He has calculated exactly how many calories and grams of protein each rider needs each day and at each meal.

Over all, though, he said riders are often free to eat what they want, particularly with Fowler in the team kitchen. With at least one exception.

"They would love to finish a day in the Tour and have a nice ice cold beer, and that's something we've never offered to them," Lim said. "But I'm sure by the end of this thing that might be something all the guys would really enjoy."

[HEALTH]

How they learned to stop dieting and embrace the fat — and exercise

Research suggests that nearly everyone who is overweight should lose weight, but no diet has been proven effective in the long run for a majority of people

BY MANDY KATZ

NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

One hundred seventy-five centimeters and 83kg, Kathryn Griffith, a retired teacher in Oakland, California, counted calories for decades, trying everything from the grapefruit diet to a regimen based on cabbage soup. She also did Weight Watchers — 27 times. "I knew it wouldn't be successful, but I went back anyway," she said.

So earlier this year, just when Oprah Winfrey, America's uber-dieter, renewed her resolve to snack on flaxseed, Griffith went the other way, joining a tenacious movement that is scorning the diet industry and what one pair of bloggers labels, "the obesity epidemic booga booga booga."

This movement — a loose alliance of therapists, scientists and others — holds that all people, "even" fat people, can eat whatever they want and, in the process, improve their physical and mental health and stabilize their weight. The aim is to behave as if you have reached your "goal weight" and to act on ambitions postponed while trying to become thin, everything from buying new clothes

to changing careers. Regular exercise should be for fun, not for slimming.

"Fat acceptance" ideas date back more than 30 years, but have lately edged into the mainstream, thanks in part to public hand-wringing by celebrities like Winfrey, Kirstie Alley and the tennis player Monica Seles, who said she had to "throw out the word 'diet' to deal with her weight gain. (Winfrey now cites her goal as being not "thin," but "healthy and strong and fit.")

Even television is belying up to the bar, with Lifetime's introduction of a hefty heroine in *Drop Dead Diva* and a show having its premiere this month on Fox that stresses the "reality" in reality TV. The show, *More to Love*, matches plus-size dates with a bachelor boasting "a big waist and an even bigger heart."

And elbowing the weight-loss guides on "health" bookshelves, is a spate of new, more diet-neutral books that track the sociology of obesity, including *The End of Overeating: Taking Control of the Insatiable American Appetite* (Rodale Books) by David Kessler, the former surgeon general, and *The Evolution of Obesity* (The Johns Hopkins University Press) by Michael L. Power and Jay Schulkin.

Adding credence to the "fat acceptance" philosophy, are recent medical studies that suggest a little extra fat may not be such a bad thing. Among the latest is a 12-year Canadian analysis in last month's *Obesity* journal (www.nature.com/oby/journal/vaop/ncurrent/abs/oby2009191a.html) that confirmed earlier findings that overweight "appears to be protective against mortality," while being too thin, like extreme obesity, correlates with higher death risk. Other recent studies have linked weight cycling (or "yo-yo dieting") to weight gain, and to medical conditions often attributed to obesity.

Many appetite warriors have coalesced under the banner of "Health at Every Size" (or HAES), which is also the title of a book by Linda Bacon, a nutrition professor at City College of San Francisco. Bacon ran a federally financed, randomized trial to compare outcomes for 78 obese women who either dieted or were schooled in Every Size precepts. The results, published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* in 2005, showed that HAES participants fared better on measures of health, physical

activity and self-esteem. Neither cohort lost weight.

Find it all too much of a stretch? You're not alone. Antidiet advice defies a US\$30-billion weight loss industry, a cultural obsession with thinness and the fundamental public health tenet that it is dangerous to be fat. In *Obesity Guidelines* first published in 1998, the US National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute blames obesity for everything from heart disease to cancer. Within a month of the Canadian mortality report, University of Wisconsin researchers announced in *Science* that calorie-restricted rhesus monkeys seemed to be outliving an amply fed control group.

"Virtually everyone who is overweight would be better off at a lower weight," said Walter Willett, chairman of the nutrition department at the Harvard School of Public Health. "There's been this misconception, fostered by the weight-is-beautiful groups, that weight doesn't matter. But the data are clear."

What remains undisputed is that no clinical trial has found a diet that keeps weight off long-term for a majority. "If they really worked, we'd be running

out of dieters," said Glenn Gaesser, professor of exercise physiology at Arizona State University and author of *Big Fat Lies: The Truth About Your Weight and Your Health*.

Both sides agree that regular exercise, at any size, improves health. "If you want to know who's going to die, know

their fitness level," said Steven Blair, a self-described "fat and fit" professor of exercise science, epidemiology and biostatistics at the University of South Carolina. His research indicates that "obese individuals who are fit have a death rate one half that of normal-weight people who are not fit."

To eat well, go back to the basics

We all knew how to eat intuitively once: Infants don't binge or starve themselves, and presumably, cavemen didn't either. But instincts become twisted in an environment where you can hold a Twinkie in one hand and the remote in the other, surrounded by images of skinny starlets.

After near-lifetimes of restricted consumption, practiced dieters find it takes a concentrated effort to learn how to answer to their appetites through a practice often called "intuitive eating."

Intuitive eating involves returning to basic drives, dispensing with the notion of "good" or "bad" foods and rules about when to eat. Absent a fear of deprivation, the philosophy holds, one's hunger and taste cues — rather than cognitive rules

— provide the most trustworthy guide toward balanced, healthy eating.

Kate Harding, an ex-dieter and an author of *Lessons From the Fat-O-Sphere*, said eating intuitively did not come easily for her at first. But eventually, she said, "If you're actually listening to your body, instead of the voices in your head, you won't be inclined to eat yourself sick very often."

Intuitive eating works only when coupled with weight-neutrality, Harding said. "The first step is to take away all the moralizing and shame," she said. To that end, she suggested, "Why not buy some clothes that fit you and turn off the TV a little bit?"

At bottom, eating is, or should be, "a basic process," she said.

— NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE