



ASK ANDREW ?

Q: What kind of nutrition strategies do you use over the course of a season, for short days, long days, and multi-day trips? What (legal and healthy) supplements and vitamins do you use? Do you just eat real food?

—Anthony Rabinowitz, South Lake Tahoe

Plain, boring old food is the mainstay of many skiers and alpinists, but there are some unusual diets as well. Alpinist Seth Shaw was a big fan of “protein missiles” from 7-11 (hot dogs). Charlie Porter ate rancid seal blubber while climbing the solo ascent of the century on Baffin Island. Alex Lowe was fond of tinned octopus, complete with congealed oil and snow. Popeye kicked ass with canned spinach.

Personally, I’m on a pretty wide-open program. Anything from raw fish to rocky mountain oysters are fair game, although as a friend pointed out, I don’t eat “packaged food” like Doritos, Oreos, or Sour Patch Kids. I’m not morally opposed to junk food; I just didn’t grow up with it, and now it wouldn’t even occur to me to buy a six-pack of Coke.

Many of the consistently strong people I’ve climbed and skied with are the same way. There might be an energy bar or gel here or there, but for the most part, it’s boring food-pyramid stuff. Packing in the bars, gels, and drink mixes works on a short-term basis, but doesn’t form a good base. In ultra-running for example, the current speedsters eat nothing but gels for 24 hours straight. This is like always running your car with the turbocharger pegged—it’s fast, but eventually important parts are going to blow out your tailpipe.

For day tours, my lunches are simple: nothing. The real horsepower comes from dinner the night before and a good breakfast. Eating lunch while you are out skiing is problematic, because first you have to stop (and get cold), then it’s hard to digest when you start moving again. Burping and breathing don’t mix. Instead, I carry a few small items like beef jerky, string cheese, or gorp in a jacket pocket and graze throughout the day. The same goes with water. I try to tank up beforehand and only drink

“Charlie Porter ate rancid seal blubber while climbing the solo ascent of the century on Baffin Island. Alex Lowe was fond of tinned octopus, complete with congealed oil and snow. Popeye kicked ass with canned spinach.”



about 8 oz. per day. The fastest woman I’ve ever skied with would routinely go without water for a day of touring, and the fastest guys generally ate snow or sipped less than 8 oz. per tour. It brings a whole new perspective to the concept of the camel-back.

Food plays a huge role during extended expeditions, especially in cold environments where you can burn up lots of calories just sitting still. The recommendation for an arctic diet is 4,000 to 6,000 calories per person per day, the equivalent of 5-7 sticks of butter. Even after loading up a cup of hot chocolate with half a stick of butter, (not recommended under usual circumstances), my personal best is about half of that. It’s just too rich.

For expeditions I bring as much food as possible from home so I know exactly what I have, and don’t run into any forced whale-blubber (or human-blubber) diets. The downside of bringing it from home is that it’s heavy, but you can usually carry a backpack full of “organics” on the plane. I plan the diet out around a five-day meal plan, repeating as necessary. It’s mainly rice, noodles, pasta, textured vegetable protein (TVP = fake meat), beans, and grains. I run veggies through a food drier (fresh browns work well), but my meat-drying experiments have been, ummmm, stringy at best.

Borge Ousland traversed the Southern Patagonia ice cap while snacking on dried reindeer hearts, and oceans have been crossed solo in 14-foot boats with only beer and onions on board. Keep me out of that berth, thank you. These are hardly normal foods, but then again, neither is anything with pro, max, hammer, or ultra in their name. A boring diet leads to exciting skiing.