
The Water Cut For Combat

Getting the water off, while still
competing at the highest level

BENDA
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ABOUT ETHAN BENDA

Ethan Benda has been a Certified Trainer since 2000, and has over 20,000 hours of training experience.

He was born with an innate drive for fitness; he was the weird kid in the neighborhood that built obstacle courses and made the other kids have pushup contests.

Ethan is a Certified Personal Trainer, Certified Specialist in Performance Nutrition, and a Certified Training For Warriors (TFW) coach. He has completed the first level of Resistance Training Specialist (biomechanics) classes and is the developer of Functional Interval Training(F.I.T.) and The Diamond Protocol.

He has trained multiple amateur and professional athletes and specialized in the physical, psychological, and nutritional demands of competitive sport, creating athletes who “never get tired.”

Ethan has studied various forms of hand-to-hand combat including Judo, Krav Maga, Submission Wrestling, and Muay Thai. He holds a Black Belt in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu under Master Renato Tavares, with multiple 1st place wins in jiu-jitsu competition. Ethan was also an All-Natural Physique Competitor & Body Builder with multiple top 5 finishes.

Ethan also presents seminars on fitness and nutrition, writes a blog focusing on motivation and goals, and is a contributor to Men’s Health Magazine, Bodybuilding.com, & Numerous National Podcasts.

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The Basics

This information is primarily intended for combat athletes that are required to weigh in for competition. In most cases there are three situations:

1. Weigh-ins the day before
2. Weigh-ins the day of or directly prior to competition
3. Weigh-ins on multiple days (tournament or gi & no-gi competition)

All 3 of these require slightly different approaches. However, our end result is always the same:

How do we go from doing something that inherently effects performance (dehydration) to competing at our highest level in a physically demanding sport?

Obviously, the best case scenario is no cut at all, but that is a rare circumstance. No matter what the situation, you need to cut as much body fat prior to any water cut. If you follow my “Eating For Fat Loss” manual, you can usually count on losing about 1-2 lbs of body fat a week. Keep this timeline in mind when planning competition. There is always a distinct advantage to the athlete that is leaner, stronger, and only has to water cut a small percentage.

DON'T FIGHT OUT OF YOUR WEIGHT CLASS!

This is one of the biggest reasons for failure. There are a couple things that athletes fail to calculate:

1. You're too fat, and you don't have enough time to lose body fat, but you choose an unrealistic weight to try to cut.

2. You're already lean, but try to cut to a weight class that doesn't allow for any body fat loss, only a dangerous amount of water loss

Research in sprint athletes regarding water loss shows:

- 2% of body weight causes **INSIGNIFICANT** performance changes (4 lbs in a 200 lbs person)
- 5% (10 lbs for a 200 lbs person) will cause **DEGRADATION** in performance up to 20%, but is still safe
- 9% (18 lbs in a 200 lbs person) causes **SIGNIFICANT DEGRADATION** in performance, up to 45% and may cause health problems
- 10% or more (+20 lbs in a 200 lbs person) is **DANGEROUS** (kidney failure, brain dysfunction, heart palpitations, coma, death)*

*Effects of dehydration increases significantly in hot/humid climates

It is important to note that the above percentages are based on **NOT** rehydrating before performance, however, as I will explain later, the human body's ability to rehydrate is directly related to how much fluid is lost and how much time you have to rehydrate. Therefore it is important to control these 2 factors.

I would bet most athletes never calculate based on a percentage of what is safe, only what they have been told or have seen someone else do.

Important:

Notice that since we are dealing with percentages, the possible water cut in pounds is *less* for athletes that weigh less, and *more* for athletes that weigh more. This seems obvious, but is often overlooked.

The main reasons dehydration has an adverse effect on exercise performance:

- Reduction in blood volume
- Decreased skin blood flow
- Decreased sweat rate
- Decreased heat dissipation
- Increased core temperature
- Increased rate of muscle glycogen use

Using Your Body

If you know the human body, you can use it to your advantage

There are some basic guidelines we want to adhere to no matter what:

- Be as lean as you can for performance and STAY lean
- Keep the water loss to 9% or under whenever possible
- Never cut water out completely for more than 24 hours
- You should start the water cut process about 5-7 days out
- Your food intake should be at “fat cutting” mode up until the water cut
- NEVER do anything extreme...in most cases your body will do the opposite of what you expect to stay alive
- Continue your normal training throughout this process
- DO NOT manipulate salt intake. Use salt and seasonings until 24 hours before weigh-ins
- Don't panic! Keep to your plan. Most fighters cause damage by going to extremes too early.

STEP 1) THE WATER LOAD/DEplete

Water can be used as a potent diuretic. Yes, this means we will be using water to cut water. It's a simple process: you overload the body with water to signal it's ok to lose water. This will make the cut significantly easier.

Start the water load 7 days prior to weigh-ins

Most people will start with about 3 gallons. If you normally drink more than 3 gallons a day, you will have to start with more.

Gradually decrease water each day by .5 - 1 gallon
Ending with 1 gallon being finished 24 hours prior to weigh-ins

Don't weigh yourself in the first few days of this. It will mess you up mentally. Just trust that the process works.

EXAMPLE (if weigh-ins are 7pm Friday)

SATURDAY-3 GALLONS

SUNDAY-3 GALLONS

MONDAY-2.5 GALLONS

TUESDAY-2 GALLONS

WEDNESDAY-1.5 GALLONS

THURSDAY-1 GALLON, FINISHED BY 7:00pm

FRIDAY-WEIGH INS AT 7:00pm

Step 2) FOOD ADJUSTMENTS

There are slight food adjustments that need to be made to optimize your body's natural process of eliminating water, but these aren't done until 3 days before (72 hours). You should be on your normal "fat cutting" food until then.

Starting 3 days out from weigh-ins (72 hours): Cut all carbs out except for the 1st or last meal of the day (your preference). All other food stays the same.

Starting 2 days out from weigh-ins (48 hours): Carbs and protein for first meal, no more carbs or fat the rest of day. Eat lean protein (chicken or turkey breast) every 3 hours.

Starting 24 hours from weigh-ins: 2 oz. chicken breast every 2-3 hours until about 12 hours from weigh-ins, then no more food. NO WATER on this day.

WHY CUT CARBS?

Carbohydrates bond with water when being converted to glycogen (stored muscle energy). It is more efficient to remove water if we deplete glycogen stores. Glycogen is stored in the body predominantly in the liver and the skeletal muscles. Muscle and liver glycogen stores can be used up in less than a day if exercising and when carbohydrates are not being consumed. We don't cut carbs completely out until 24 hours prior so that we can maintain training intensity.

WHY EAT PROTEIN?

Protein uses metabolic water and keeps your metabolism primed. You want your metabolism to continue to burn as you are "cutting". If you've ever watched a "survival" show, they always warn about consuming protein without drinking water because it will cause further dehydration. We want to take advantage of this. You will continue to metabolize body fat throughout this process as well.

Step 3)THE LAST 12 HOURS

You have primed your body with the water load to more safely drop water. If you have done things correctly, you should be on target or within a few pounds by 12 hours from weigh-ins. At this point we can go to more traditional methods if necessary:

- Sauna (best if done as a cycle of 20 minutes, with 20 minutes of cardio OUTSIDE of sauna to cool off)
- Hot tub (best if done as a cycle of 20 minutes, with 20 minutes of cardio OUTSIDE of sauna to cool off)
- Salt bath in hot water (not super effective, but can help)
- Treadmill or cardio sweat (my favorite)

CAFFEINE

Caffeine is a potent diuretic and can be used effectively. Since we aren't drinking water the last 24 hours, we want to take the caffeine as a pill, which can be bought at almost any

drug store. Each pill is about 200 mg, which is a significant amount. If you drink a lot of coffee or energy drinks, you could do 400 mg the last 24 hours before weigh ins. If you aren't a regular consumer of caffeine, you may just do 100-200 mg. You can take it any time it makes sense to help drive a little more water out and increase heart rate to help you sweat, but I've found it is most effective if I take it 30 minutes before I do any light cardio sweating to work up a sweat.

Post Weigh-in

Any level of dehydration does some damage, but since we did it the smart way, we minimized it

The Damage

- Dehydration of organs and tissue, including the brain
- Electrolyte deficiency due to sweating
- Glycogen depletion from liver, muscle, and brain
- Start of muscle catabolism from amino depletion

The Remedy (if weighing in the day before or several hours before fight)

Immediately after weigh-in

- Glycogen refuel: 36 oz sugary juice (grape juice) or carbohydrate supplement (Karbolyln)
- Electrolyte re-balance: minimum of 48 oz gatorade or electrolyte supplement
- Anabolic re-start: Protein shake or BCAA pills/powder
- Continue drinking water mixed with high sugar juice (about 50/50) for about an hour
- Eat high-sodium meal

Continue:

- Rehydrate: 24oz. water for each pound lost the last 24 hours
- Continue glycogen refuel: (aprox. 100 grams carbs per pound lost since carb cut-out. 10 lbs = 1000 grams (4000 calories.) More is ok
- Continue Amino load: 1 gram protein per pound of Lean Body Mass (aprox.) More is ok.

The Remedy (if weighing in immediately before fight)

You should have the following ready-made in a 32 ounce bottle:

- 100 grams of carb supplement (Karbolyn)
- 7 grams of BCAA powder
- Electrolyte replacement supplement (Xtend)

Drink HALF of this IMMEDIATELY after weigh-in, then sip on the rest as needed

*For Tournaments or 2-day events that require weigh-in both days, you will need to do a combination of the above. You are usually safe eating a good meal after competing day 1, but monitor your weight. You should safely be able to sweat out or metabolize about 1-3% of your weight in just a couple hours.

Electrolytes

How your cells “talk” to each other

Electrolytes are what your cells (especially nerve, heart, muscle) use to maintain voltages across their cell membranes and to carry electrical impulses (nerve impulses, muscle contractions) across themselves and to other cells. Your kidneys work to keep the electrolyte concentrations in your blood constant despite changes in your body. For example, when you exercise heavily, you lose electrolytes in your sweat, particularly sodium and potassium. These electrolytes must be replaced to keep the electrolyte concentrations of your body fluids constant.

**SIMPLY PUT, ELECTROLYTES ARE HOW YOUR CELLS
“TALK” TO EACH OTHER**

You may have noticed this plan does not manipulate sodium, save the last 24 hours when you aren't consuming any food. In fact, you should be using salt and seasoning especially while doing the water load. Regardless of what you may have been told, salt DOES NOT make you hold water when in the presence of enough consumed water (which is usually half a gallon or less). In fact, sodium is necessary to move water in and out of your cells.

These are all of the electrolytes:

- sodium
- potassium
- chloride
- calcium
- magnesium
- bicarbonate

- phosphate
- sulfate

Symptoms of electrolyte imbalance:

- lethargy and confusion
- muscle twitches
- seizures
- coma
- death

In Short:

- Don't mess with your salt
- If you sweat a lot, replace your electrolytes (pills are available)
- If you drink excessive amounts of water, replace your electrolytes (water can be a diuretic)
- DON'T MESS WITH YOUR SALT!

Wrap Up

Knowledge is not power, ACTION is power

I've lost count how many athletes I've helped with weight cuts. It has to be over 100. The one thing all the really successful ones had was a good attitude, no matter how nasty the cut was. My top athletes will always respond with "It's going great, coach", even if they are completely miserable. The goal, obviously is to keep the miserable to a minimum. If you stay close to your weight, be honest with yourself, and keep a positive attitude, you can nail it every time.

Combat sports are not for the lazy, the undisciplined, or the weak. If you compete in a combat sport you are stepping into a world that requires knowledge of your own body. You need to know how far you can push yourself to make yourself better....not broken....but BETTER.

You should strive to make yourself as lean, conditioned, and strong as possible. You should live your life like an elite athlete.

Now go do some work!

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