

# Alonzo Stagg 50/20 Hike

## Nutrition and Fluids Suggestions for Long Distance Hikers (2014 Update)

**(This Writeup is Especially Intended for Those Planning to Hike 25 or More Miles)**

### Hydration and Food During the Week Leading Up to the Hike

Most long hikers end up badly dehydrated by the time they finish, even if they've been drinking extensively during the hike. This can be a very serious issue if it's a hot, very cold, or windy day. To reduce this problem, hikers should sharply reduce caffeinated drinks and drink at least two quarts of water daily during the week before the hike, spaced throughout each day. This builds up a reserve in your body before the hike – and also helps wash out a lot of caffeine and sugar.

### Meal Advice for Pre-Hike Thursday and Friday

The 50/20 Hike is similar to a marathon. Even a 20-mile hike is a very strenuous endeavor if you haven't been practicing. You can help yourself "somewhat" with proper nutrition the two days prior to the Hike. Many long-distance hikers and runners do heavy "carb loading" (that is, a big pasta dinner) before their event. This meal should be eaten two nights before the Hike; that is, on Thursday night. Others believe that a large but balanced dinner with protein and mixed carbohydrates is a better choice (for example, meat, rice or pasta, and vegetables), again two nights before the hike. Eat balanced, moderate meals the day and night before the hike. Whichever you choose, don't eat excessive amounts the day and night before the Hike, eat foods that you are accustomed to eating, make healthy choices, avoid sweets such as cookies and candy, and also avoid sodas, coffee, and any type of alcohol.

In addition, do not eat dairy products the night before (or during) the hike. While there are a few people who can eat dairy products before a big endurance event, they are the exceptions. **DON'T DO IT!** This means **NO PIZZA, NO CHEESE, and NO MILK!**

Finally, don't eat after 7:00 pm; give your body a chance to digest before bedtime.

### Advice for Saturday Morning

Eat a moderate breakfast (don't start off hungry). Avoid excessively sweet foods, such as donuts, pancakes with syrup, or candy. Too much sugar can make you dizzy, nauseous, and tired. Drink healthy fluids, such as water and unsweetened juice. Again, avoid caffeinate drinks (sodas and coffee) and continue to avoid milk or other dairy products.

### Fluids During the Hike

Even though water and sports drinks will be available at the Support Stops, each hiker **MUST** have a water bottle, should drink continuously while hiking, and should re-fill the bottle at each station before continuing on the Hike. To repeat, the most critical concern for anyone involved in this activity is proper hydration! You need to drink a lot of water both before starting and during the hike. The body loses fluids through sweating and breathing, and replacement is essential. Yes, you still sweat even if it's raining or very cold outside, and you also continuously lose moisture by breathing – especially in very nice (dry) weather. Drink before you

become thirsty. If you wait until you are already thirsty, you are already dehydrated and will very likely have a much more difficult time reaching your intended goal. Dehydration will not only hinder your performance (you will get tired, walk slower, and might get cramps), but it might lead to serious complications, especially in hot weather. Drinks that do a good job keeping you hydrated are water, sports drinks (these are far better diluted one-to-one with water), and diluted, unsweetened fruit juices.

**HOWEVER, avoid carrying a big hydration bladder like a Camelbak with a gallon of water in it.** A gallon of water weighs 8 pounds, not counting the weight of the hydration bladder. That is a lot of weight to carry, when all you really need is a liter or so between stops. You don't have that far to go between stops (no more than 8 miles between any two Support Stops). Be smart about it.

## **Food During the Hike**

The following foods are recommended during the hike (all of which you should try on training hikes):

- \* Bagels or dry muffins (avoid "greasy" types, and don't add cream cheese, jelly, or butter)
- \* Granola bars (except avoid those that are more like candy bars, with chocolate coatings)
- \* Bananas, apples, oranges, and other **ripe**, fresh fruits.
- \* Gel/GU (only if you have tried this before on training hikes)
- \* Power Bars (only if you have tried this before on training hikes)
- \* Soups if available

You can eat "regular" foods, and you probably should if that's what you ate all week long prior to the hike. However (and again), avoid candy bars, junk food chips, sweet rolls, and similar items unless you're having a blood sugar crisis, and even then be restrained. Most successful long-distance hikers eat a small amount almost continuously while hiking, as opposed to eating a pile of food at each rest stop and then nothing between the stops. That's a good strategy for everyone.

## **Electrolytes**

If you are eating plenty of food and drinking Gatorade or some other type of sport-drink, you will have no need for any type of electrolyte supplement. However, if it's a hot day or if you're drinking nothing but water and minimal food, you can start to deplete your electrolytic balance, leading to cramps, headaches, and extreme fatigue. If you can taste salt on your lips, you should start drinking sport drinks and up the salt content of your food. Sport drinks have plenty of electrolytes but most of them are also stuffed with sugar, which you definitely don't need in excess. The best foods for salt are soups and any sandwich with yellow mustard (soups and mustard are both high in salt, and it's already dissolved, which reduces stomach upset and increases absorption into the body). The use of salt tablets, however, is NOT recommended.

**Good Luck! Hike On!**