

BONKING ON THE TRAILS

Rim to Rim Veteran Dr. Rob Riley

1. **Symptoms** of “The Bonk”:

- fatigue
- reduced performance (“hitting the wall”)
- fast heart rate
- shortness of breath with minimal activity
- nausea/(vomiting)
- dizziness
- slow, fuzzy thinking

2. **Causes**

- lack of fuel (calories)
- overheating
- dehydration
- electrolyte abnormalities

3. **Prevention**

- Train regularly, especially in the heat. Your body adapts.
- If overweight, get your weight down! (This is a HUGE help!)
- Get plenty of calories for the few days before the hike.
- Take in calories REGULARLY during the hike. (See Ron’s lecture, “Fuel for the Canyon.”)
- Stay cool: light clothing, hat with a brim, shade when possible, light pack, get wet
- Begin the hike well-hydrated. Start the day before and continue the morning of the hike.
- Drink REGULARLY during the hike. How much and how often needs to be individualized based on the person and the conditions. A good general guideline for exerting in the heat is about 8 oz. every 15 minutes. Don’t get behind!
- Replace electrolytes. Over the long sorts of hikes we do, a lot of salt can be lost in sweat. Taking adequate fluid but inadequate electrolytes can lead to the dangerous situation of hyponatremia—low blood levels of sodium (salt). Options include: sports drinks (especially “endurance formulas” which have more sodium), salty snacks, Nuun tablets, other electrolyte supplements.
- General safety measures: Hike with a friend. Have a means of communicating with the rest of the team.

4. **Treatment**

- Unfortunately, it may not be possible to tell which problem has caused YOUR bonk, so we treat ‘em all:
- STOP. This usually isn’t hard since your body isn’t responding to your orders to keep moving anyway.
- Cool down. Find a shady spot. Pour cold water on yourself.
- Eat. Goo is absorbed quicker than most regular foods.
- Drink. See if you can get a liter in in 30 minutes.
- Supplement your electrolytes.
- Get your feet up above the level of your heart. When hiking, the body preferentially shunts blood to the big muscles of the legs. When bonking, we

need some of that to redistribute back to the core. Getting your legs up gets gravity on OUR side.

5. **Resumption of activity**

--Stay down for **30 minutes**, utilizing the treatment measures above, then get up and see if you can proceed. It takes at least this long for the treatment measures to have much effect. If you're unable to proceed then, get back down, continue the treatment measures, and try again every 15 minutes.

--When able, resume activity at a slower pace, utilizing all of the prevention measures above. Slow and steady wins the race. If you're able to stand, you'll probably find you can at least take baby steps. And enough baby steps WILL get you out of the Canyon!