The Winter Weight Gain… and How to Combat It…
By Kenneth Lundgren

Many of the athletes with whom I work have been asking me about diet, how to lose weight, etc... Most riders, if not all, gain weight during the winter, and it's only natural... Like everything in this sport, you need to carefully dose your diet. You can't eat like a monk all the time -- then you'll have that huge crash... There is a window of time -- like when you're preparing to peak and in full Monk Mode -- where you should carefully watch every morsel that passes your lips, but when you're not close to a peak event, you need to eat logically...

For one, you need to eat according to your energy demands. For instance, in early to mid-winter, the athlete is in the gym and completing heavy force work on the bike. For the Elite Endurance athletes, they're also completing plenty of aerobic work to ensure this critical part of the engine can support the heavier workloads that will come down the road... With this type of shorter riding, it is perfectly okay to consume more protein during this training phase.

For one, protein fills you up faster. Protein will help keep those extra pounds off while also keeping energy levels very steady... During the cycling season, you of course will need heavy amounts of carbs to fuel your TSS for the week and to replenish your glycogen stores, but during this winter phase the athlete can get away with eating more protein... The protein, as we all know, will also help rebuild muscle broken down in the gym and on the bike during those force workouts...

Also, eat more fiber. Fiber, like protein, makes you feel full faster. Of equal importance, fiber helps keep your cholesterol levels low. Fiber can be prevalently found in apples, many cereals, oatmeal, beans, and whole-grain breads.

Chris Carmichael, years ago, offered a great tip: don't overeat before your rides. If an athlete is riding mid-day, he/she will load up on lunch. For this time of the year, that type of caloric overload isn't necessary. I would recommend perhaps having an extra banana or such with lunch, then eat more ON THE BIKE if necessary, and then make sure you have a healthy post-ride meal (for EVERY ride). Not only will you feel better this way, but you will also perform better and weigh less in the end.

I can speak from experience that skipping breakfast is a BAD idea... On your recovery days, don't just have a coffee for breakfast -- make sure you get all the bases covered with either some healthy carbs or lean protein... If you don't eat, your metabolism will come to a virtual standstill. Your body will burn fewer calories during the day and you'll feel very flat... Don't NOT eat because you're trying to watch your weight -- on a regular basic, this can seriously debilitate your long-term performance...

I also cannot stress enough how important it is to hydrate fully during indoor sessions. In my opinion, indoor rides of this time should be limited to 90 minutes. With my athletes,
I'll see the HR really creeping up at the end, a sign that the athlete is not hydrating enough... OR I'll see the power and HR really drop, another sign that the blood is thickening and the body just cannot push any longer -- another sign that more hydration is necessary... You should be constantly sipping when riding indoors, and then post-ride down your smoothie, protein shake, what have you, and then a bottle or two of water. An hour later, you should be pissing clear. If you aren't, get to the water cooler... It is not uncommon for a rider to do a quality indoor session, then two or three days later have a bad, bad day... This, more often than not, is the ill effect of dehydration biting you in the arse... Help yourself to a plate of steady training and drink up!

In summation, eat more protein with your meals... Protein will help develop the muscle we're building now and also keep us full, keeping those unwanted winter pounds away... From my research, protein stops hunger pangs because of a hormone called PYY. PYY reduces food consumption by sending signals to the brain that indicates fullness. The best protein? Turkey, chicken, fish, EGGS.

I hope this helps, guys and gals. If you try to eat logically, according to the Glycemic Index and according to your energy demands and needs, your diet will become heathy, second-nature, not a chore, and it will become that much easier to really bite the bullet and follow a monkish diet for that window of time where everything in your life needs to point to that peak...