

Nutrition



NUTRITIONIST TIP

"Fuelling your body with the right food and fluids is the key to sustained energy levels and top performance."

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INTRODUCTION

To perform well, be it for training or competing, the body needs enough **fuel** generated from **carbohydrates** stored in the muscles and in the liver. The carbohydrates we eat are stored as glycogen in the muscles and this provides an important source of fuel for exercise. For an athlete who is training and competing it is vital that this source is constantly restored. Carbohydrates are also stored in smaller amounts in the liver (liver glycogen). This reserve helps to maintain normal blood glucose levels and is important during long work-outs or endurance events.

Normal overnight fasting, which occurs while you are asleep, will deplete these levels, which in turn can reduce your training and competing capacity. Breakfast, therefore, is an important meal.

Eating a carbohydrate-rich meal or snack before sports gives you a better chance of regulating normal blood glucose levels.

Dehydration can also reduce your capacity to train and compete. In most situations, sweat loss during exercise is greater than the amount of fluid replaced during a session. Therefore, it makes good sense to start the session well hydrated. This means drinking plenty of fluid with your pre-event meal or snack and having another drink 10-15 minutes before the start of a work-out or training session.

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Food before training or competing should:

- be easy to digest
- high in carbohydrates
- low in fat
- include fluids (but not tea or coffee)

Choose foods that will not upset your stomach. It is best not to try new foods on the day of an important competition. It is a good idea, however, to experiment during training.

Foods high in carbohydrates are great for topping up liver and muscle glycogen levels. It has also been suggested that foods with a low G.I index (glycaemic index) are beneficial as they release energy at a slower rate and provide a more controlled blood sugar level. Examples of low G.I. foods are baked beans, pasta and oats.

If you do suffer from an upset stomach before competition, a low fibre carbohydrate food or even a liquid meal like a banana smoothie may help.

Pre-exercise eating ideas

It is advisable to eat at least one hour before training or competing. Again this is something that can be experimented with during training to find the most suitable time for the athlete.

Some of the foods listed below are suitable as pre event foods:

- Breakfast cereal with reduced fat milk and fruit
- Porridge with reduced fat milk and fruit
- English muffins or crumpets toasted with vegemite
- Creamed rice with fruit
- Spaghetti with a low fat sauce (tomato based if possible)
- Jacket potato with tuna and salad
- Grain and fruit based bar
- Banana

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- Fresh fruit salad with low fat yoghurt
- Banana smoothie with low fat milk
- Salad sandwich on wholemeal or grain bread.

Post-event eating ideas

After exercising the body will have depleted some of its energy stores and will need replenishing. The ideal time to eat is 30 minutes after exercising—the body replaces glycogen at a quicker rate when carbohydrates and fluids are taken soon after exercise. This will be important if the athlete is training at a higher level or more than once a day. If this is not possible, it is advisable that food and fluids be taken within two hours of exercise. A more complex meal can be eaten later. As with pre event meals the post event meal should be easy to digest, low in fat, high in carbohydrate and contain fluids. To help with recovery of muscles, some protein should be included.

Some foods to be eaten after exercise could include:

- low-fat muffins
- grain and fruit based bar
- rice crackers
- banana sandwich

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Question

Answer

What is a good choice of snack before competing?

Fresh fruit and yoghurt or a small bowl of wholegrain cereal.

Is it better to drink water or a sports drink?

Water is the best fluid to drink most of the time, however sports drinks can be useful to replace carbohydrates and fluid in longer duration exercise sessions.

EXAMPLES OF HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES



NUTRITIONIST TIP

“Fresh fruit and vegetables are a fantastic fuel source for athletes.”