

Nutrition Facts and Tips for Athletes

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Below you will find some information on what to eat and when to eat for athletics. This is certainly not all there is to know about the subject but hopefully it will give you a starting point.

There are three sources of energy the body can use: Carbohydrates, Proteins, and Fats. The source easiest for the body to break down and use for energy is carbohydrates. This is the first source the body will use for energy. The body uses fat secondarily for energy but it takes longer to break this down and produce energy. Lastly, the body can use protein but at a very limited level. During athletic activity your body needs and uses carbohydrates for energy.

What is a carbohydrate?

A food product made up mainly of sugar forms (simple and complex) along with B vitamins. Ex: bread, pasta, rice, oatmeal, crackers

What IS a protein?

A food product such as meat (red meat, chicken, pork, and veal), fish, seafood, peanuts, nuts, beans, eggs, dairy and tofu.

What is a fat?

Food products that contain oils and butters, or excessive sugar that turns into fat when not burned off. Ex: butter, fried food (cooked in oil), baked goods (generally cooked with butter and excessive sugar).

When to eat for athletics:

PRE-PRACTICE/PRE-GAME:

If eating a full meal, it should be consumed 3-4 hours before a game or practice in order for the body to have enough time to digest the food.

If eating a small meal, it should be consumed 2 hours before a game or practice. A small snack can be consumed 30 minutes prior to the game or practice.

POST-PRACTICE/POST-GAME:

Both a snack and a meal should be consumed after a hard practice or game. Within 30 minutes after the end of the practice/game either the full meal or a snack should be consumed. A couple hours later the other should be consumed. It's important to replenish the carbohydrate that has been used for energy along with protein to help repair any muscle damage.

Ideas for snacks and meals:

SNACKS:

- Piece of fruit (specifically a banana) (pre) w/ cheese (post)
- Sweet potato (pre)
- Granola bar (pre) w/ milk (post)
- Apple and peanut butter (pre/post)
- Peanut butter crackers (pre/post)
- ½ or full PB & J sandwich on whole grain bread (pre/post)
- Yogurt w/ fruit and granola (pre/post)
- Chocolate milk (post)
- Trail mix (post)
- Hardboiled egg w/ whole grain crackers (post)
- Chocolate milk (post)

MEAL IDEAS:

Pre: (heavier carb/lighter on protein)

BREAKFAST:

- Yogurt w/ fruit and granola
- Oatmeal w/ fruit and milk
- Toast w/ peanut butter and fruit (banana, berries, etc)
- Cereal and milk w/ a fruit
- Whole grain waffles w/ hardboiled egg and fruit

LUNCH/DINNER:

- Slice of cheese or veggie pizza w/ fruit (banana, berries) & spinach salad
- PB & J or PB & Banana sandwich on whole grain bread w/ fruit and spinach salad
- Turkey and cheese on whole grain bread w/ fruit and spinach salad
- Pasta w/ a little meat or tomato sauce and spinach and side fruit

Post: (carb/protein)

- Chicken and sweet/white potato w/ vegetables
- Spaghetti and meatballs w/ vegetables
- Turkey and cheese sandwich w/ salad
- Fish and rice w/ vegetable
- Chicken and veggie stir fry in red sauce with whole wheat pasta

Hydration/Drinks:

Everyone is different and therefore each person may require different amounts of water and electrolytes/minerals to keep their bodies functioning at their best abilities. Individuals sweat at different rates and their sweat is made up of different percentages of electrolytes. This means that one athlete may need to consume, for example, more sodium than another athlete after an athletic event.

Hydration should start the day before a practice, race, game, etc. One easy way to judge whether you are hydrated is to look at the color of your urine. If your urine is the color of lemonade you are hydrated. If it is the color of apple juice, then you are dehydrated. Another guide is how often you have to urinate. The more often one has to urinate the better hydrated you are.

PRE-PRACTICE/PRE-GAME:

Water and a balanced diet before practices and events will get you hydrated to start the event.

MID-EVENT:

If the practice, game, etc. will last longer than an hour you may need something other than water to help replenish the energy you use and the electrolytes you sweat out during exercise. One could consume either a sports drink or have a snack to help replenish these things.

Sports drinks are designed to replenish some of the electrolytes the body sweats out along with carbohydrates for energy.

Drinking water and eating a snack such as bananas, hard pretzels, or oranges to name a few can also have the same outcome as consuming a sports drink.

POST-PRACTICE/POST-GAME:

Similar to pre-event recommendations a combination of water and a balanced diet will rehydrate and replenish electrolytes. A sports drink may help to quicken the process of replenishing electrolytes. Its key to rehydrate in order to be ready for an athletic event the following day.

Resources:

- American Dietetic Association www.eatright.org
- Clark, Nancy, MS, RD. Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook. 4th Ed. Champagne (IL): Leisure Press; 2008.