

Eating While Competing

Pre-event Nutrition Basics for the Competitive Sportsperson

Competitive sportspeople should ensure their nutrition is right for them, throughout the entire competitive season from pre-season workouts to championship events. When people exercise or play sport, each person has individual food preferences or aversions. No one food is the "right" food or meal for every person. The guidelines below may help you to develop your own pre-competition eating program.

The overall goal of eating before competing is to fuel your muscles for the event without causing stomach upset.

1. Choose foods that are good to your stomach and are comfortable prior to exercise. Never try a new food or meal on the day of an event. Always test food choices prior to a practice session to be sure they don't cause stomach upset.
2. Carbohydrate foods are the best choices prior to an event because they digest quickly and are a ready fuel source for the working muscle. Cereals, bagels, fruit, fruit juices, pasta, crackers and yogurt are good options.
3. Protein takes longer to digest and fat stays in the stomach longest before being digested and absorbed. You want the food you eat prior to an event to be digested before the event so you can use the energy and avoid discomfort.
4. Meal Timing - Allow three to five hours before competition or exercise for a large meal to digest, two to three hours for a smaller meal, and one to two hours for a snack.

- **Before Morning Events**

Eat a good, high carbohydrate dinner and snack the night before. Have a light meal for breakfast (toast and juice and/or a bowl of cereal) before the event.

- **Before Afternoon Events**

Eat a good breakfast in the morning and a light snack one to two hours prior to the event.

- **Before Evening Events**

Eat a good breakfast and lunch, then a light snack as tolerated before the event.

- **For Day-Long Events**

If you have one event in the morning and then another event in the afternoon or evening it can present a nutrition challenge. Be sure to fuel up well the night before all-day events. Bring small, high carbohydrate snacks with you to the event to keep blood sugar levels even and keep your muscles full of energy. Be sure to finish small meals/snacks at least one to two hours prior to the event to avoid stomach upset. Avoid simple sugars during the daylong events - they can cause significant blood sugar fluctuations.

It is very important that you test what you eat during training sessions prior to events. If you are certain that a particular meal feels fine during training, it's likely to be fine during competition, too.

5. FLUIDS ARE VITAL TOO!

- Stay hydrated during daylong and weekend competitive events.
- Bring a water bottle with you and sip throughout the day.
- Drink sports drinks during and between events to get a little added carbohydrate and electrolytes.
- Some athletes lose their appetite during competition. When eating solid food just doesn't feel good, drinking sports drinks and juices to provide fuel for events will help athletes fuel muscles.

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