

## Eating around exercise



Have you ever watched sports on the TV and noticed tennis players eating bananas during a match, cyclists in the Tour de France drinking sports drinks, or football players eating oranges at halftime?

This is because what you eat before, during, and after exercise can influence performance, especially when you are exercising for a long duration of time.

A well-planned diet will support your training programme and help you recover faster, reducing your risk of injury. Eating is also necessary to maintain good health and reduce your risk of disease or overtraining.

In this article, we explain what you should eat before, during, and after exercise to keep you in top shape!

### **Importance of maintaining your energy levels**

Both carbohydrates and fats can be used to provide energy during exercise. Either source can dominate, and this depends on the type of exercise, duration, physical conditioning as well as the diet consumed before exercising. Energy helps maintain your body weight and maximise your performance and training. If you don't get enough energy from your diet, your performance will suffer. Over time, your muscles and bones may weaken and you may be at greater risk of getting sick or injured, as well as having poor recovery.



## **Before exercising**

What you eat before exercising can have a big influence on how much energy you have and your level of performance.

Eating poorly before exercising can mean more exertion and effort being put in to finish the exercise, and performance can suffer.

In many cases, you should eat a small meal two to four hours before exercising. This will increase your liver and muscle glycogen levels (glycogen is the fuel that provides energy, from carbohydrates), allowing you to train at your optimal level and for longer.

Ensure that what you eat before exercise contains a moderate amount of protein to aid post-exercise recovery and a good serving of carbohydrates to raise blood glucose. To avoid digestive problems, such as stomach pain or discomfort, limit the fat and fibre content. You may need to try different lengths of time for your pre-exercise meal to ensure you don't feel uncomfortable when you start to be physically active.

Here are some ideas for pre-exercise snacks and meals, 2-4 hours before:

### **Meals:**

- Chicken salad sandwich
- Pasta with tomato sauce and prawns
- Baked beans on toast
- Oats cooked with skimmed milk and fruit

### **Snacks:**

- A ripe banana and a glass of milk
- A fruit smoothie with milk
- Cereal or energy bar
- Toast with peanut butter and berries

If there is only one hour or less until the event or performance, stick to liquids such as sports drinks, or easy to digest fruits such as watermelon, peach or a pear.

If you're going to compete or plan to exercise for more than 90 minutes regularly, perhaps running a marathon or participating in a long-distance cycling race, it would be a good idea to see a registered sports nutritionist or dietitian. They will help work on specific pre-exercise plans to help you optimally fuel to maximise performance. A sports dietitian may also recommend working on carb loading in the build-up to the event, but this should be an individual approach, based on requirements.



### **During exercise**

Eating while exercising helps provide a rapid source of carbohydrates to working muscles. This is important when you exercise continuously for more than an hour, as after this time, body glycogen stores can rapidly deplete. Consuming energy will prevent you from getting tired too quickly and will help you to keep your performance at its best.

If you exercise for over 60 minutes, aim to eat 60g to 80g of carbohydrates per hour, depending on your body weight. This can be something such as a 500ml of an isotonic sports drink (hydration during exercise is another key aspect) or from a more solid snack. Sports gels are handy and convenient, but they don't provide fluids so you also need to drink water to avoid dehydration.

Adequate hydration during long routines, especially in hot climates where perspiration is excessive, is extremely important to avoid dehydration and loss of electrolytes through sweat. An average of 150-350ml of a sports drink with 6-8% carbohydrates should be consumed every 15-20 minutes.

### **Snack ideas to eat during exercise**

Here are some ideas for pre-exercise snacks and meals.

- Sports / isotonic drinks (500 ml)
- 1-2 Sports Gels
- Chew blocks (less sweet than gels)
- Energy bars
- Food such as banana, dates, raisins, jelly babies



### **After exercising**

When you have finished exercising, eating something soon can be crucial to recharge your glycogen stores. How much and when you eat will depend on the duration and intensity of your training and when you plan to exercise again.

Try to eat no more than 30-45 minutes after exercising. After that, aim to eat 1 to 1.2 grams of carbs for every kilogram of body weight every hour for the next 4 hours. For example, if you weigh 60 kilos you should eat between 60 and 90 grams of carbohydrates. If you don't plan to return to training for a day or more, then a carbohydrate-rich meal should be enough to replenish your glycogen stores. Including around 20-25g protein per meal after exercising helps build and repair muscle tissue, aiding in recovery.



**Post-exercise snack idea**

- 1 or 2 Greek yogurts (you can add fresh fruit)
- 1 sports bar (containing carbohydrates and protein)
- A bagel topped with peanut butter and fruit, or eggs
- Baked potato with beans and cheese, with salad
- A piece of fruit + a chocolate milkshake

**Vitamin and mineral supplements**

In general, many people will not require vitamin and mineral supplements. Some athletes may require supplements; however this is based on individual needs and should only be warranted after an assessment with a registered dietitian. Reach out to our team today, to discuss your exercise and nutrition plan, to see if you also require supplements, and how best to optimise your performance!

To book an appointment with one of our sports dietitians, visit our website [www.dietitianfit.co.uk](http://www.dietitianfit.co.uk) or call us 020 8168 6887.

