Sports Nutrition

Functions of the pre-competition meal
The meal before competition is extremely important due to the energy and fluid it provides. A poorly planned meal can interfere with performance. A well-chosen meal can:

- Help prevent hypoglycemia (low blood sugar)
- Help settle the stomach
- Prevent hunger during competition
- Fuel the muscles for optimum performance
- Satisfy your mind that you have adequately prepared your body with fuel
- Adequately hydrate
- Avoid undesirable changes in energy expenditure during digestion

Guidelines for when to consume a pre-competition meal:
- 3-4 hours before competition for a large meal
- 2-3 hours before competition for a small meal
- 1-2 hours before competition for a liquid meal
- <1 hour before competition for a small snack

Content of a pre-competition meal:
- Maximize carbohydrates, as they digest the quickest
- Avoid too many simple sugars, such as fruit, candy and cookies
- Avoid high fibrous foods and anything that causes intestinal gas or indigestion, such as beans, corn, cabbage, and spinach
- Choose high-starch, low-fat carbs such as breads, whole-wheat cereals, bagels, pasta, pancakes, and English muffins
- Eat minimal amounts of fat and protein, as they take the longest to digest
- Ingest plenty of fluids, especially water, and over-hydrate the day before the event
- Eat familiar foods before an event as new foods can upset the stomach
- If you tend to get nervous the day of competition, and have a hard time getting in enough food, eat well and consume plenty of fluids the day before

The importance of grazing
Snacks, or “grazing”, can be an important part of an athlete’s meal plan, but only when they supplement the larger, more nutritious meals, provide carbs, and little or no fat. Be careful with high sugar, high fat snacks, such as cookies, some crackers, and candy. A sugar fix before exercising can cause hypoglycemia that can result in fatigue and poor concentration. Yes! That candy bar could actually damage performance. It will not give you that quick, extra lasting, energy boost you have always heard about.

- Dry cereal – Chex, Life, Cheerios, Shredded Wheat, and others
- Muffins – low fat with fruit or nuts
- Fruits – fresh, dried, canned, with no sugar
- Yogurt – frozen or regular, low fat with fruit
- Crackers – bran, rye, sesame, saltines, graham, and others with low fat
- Nuts and seeds – peanuts, almonds, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds (limited quantities)
- Baked potatoes – sweet, plain or with yogurt or cottage cheese in place of butter and sour cream
- Veggies – raw, steamed, frozen, or canned
- Bagels – whole grain, oat bran with jam/jelly
- Milkshakes – homemade with frozen yogurt with cereal and fruit, use skim or 1% milk
- Frozen fruit bars
- PB&J sandwich on whole wheat
- Tuna fish sandwich with fat-free mayo on whole wheat
- Oatmeal – old fashioned, cooked, add nuts, raisins, dates, use skim or 1% milk
- Cottage cheese – low fat with fruit/crackers
- Rice Cakes
- Sports bars – power bars that are high carb and low fat
- Pasta – plain with spices, hot or cold; avoid cream sauces
- Toast – plain or with jelly
- Slice of cheese pizza
- Rice – hot or cold, long grain
- Pretzels
- Popcorn – lite or plain and/or with favorite spices
- Baked chips
- Ginger snaps or animal crackers
- Angel food cake
- Tortillas or wraps with veggies
- Low-fat pudding
- Baked sweet potato with low-fat margarine and brown sugar
**Road trip eating**

Tips for healthy choices on the road:
- Carry a personal bottled water supply and food items that will not spoil such as apples, pears, bananas, bagels, and others to supplement fast food.
- Be selective with menu choices and ask for deletions or substitutions.
- Avoid high-fat food items.
- Avoid heavy cream dressings, sauces, cheese, cheese sauces, and gravies.

Be menu savvy:
- Appetizers – Fruit plates without dressings or cheese, clear broth-based soups such as vegetable, lentil, bean, minestrone, and chicken and rice.
- Breads – Rolls and breads: whole wheat, pumpernickel, rye, but go easy on the butter or margarine.
- Salads – Plenty of veggies and dark green lettuces, garbanzo beans, sunflower seeds, lite or low-calorie dressings; limit the amount of cheese and mayo-based salads.
- Beans – Navy, kidney, pinto, etc., without cheeses; avoid refried beans, which are made with lard.
- Seafood and poultry – Chicken, fish, and seafood prepared by poaching, roasting, steaming, baking, or grilling/broiling, and go light on the butter.
- Beef – Servings are usually large, depending on the cut – eat only half and take home the other or share with a friend. Trim all visible fat and use the gravies and sauces sparingly.
- Pasta – More, more, more. Hot or cold, served with tomato sauces and veggies, but go easy on the Parmesan cheese.
- Rice – Steamed is best
- Veggies – Plain, unbuttered; use cheese or special sauces sparingly
- Potatoes – Baked without the butter or sour cream; try low-fat yogurt, low-fat dressing such as ranch, cottage cheese, and/or veggies on top
- Dessert – Sherbet, fruit, or non/low-fat frozen yogurt, angel food cake, and low-fat whipped cream
- Beverages – Water, tea, low/non-fat milk, fruit and veggie juices

**Tips for eating in cafeterias, restaurants, and fast food**

Rule of thumb: If you order anything from a restaurant menu, don’t be afraid to ask for substitutions or deletions of items such as butter and mayo. Ask for dressings on the side. Be a high-maintenance eater.

Cafeteria and fast food eating tips:
- Choose beverages such as skim or low-fat milk, unsweetened juices, tea, or water.
- Avoid or go lightly on condiments such as mayo, mustard, and dressings.
- Avoid or go lightly on margarine, butter, and sour cream.
- Avoid heavy brown or cream gravies.
- Avoid or go very lightly on fried foods.
- Choose clear broth soups in place of cream-based.
- Try chili instead of cream soups.
- Avoid meats that are fried and breaded.
- Trim visible fat from meat.
- Choose chicken and turkey prepared without the skin and fat.
- Choose meats that are baked, broiled, or grilled without gravies.
- Choose vegetables without cheese or cream toppings.
- Pick vegetables that are raw or steamed.
- Choose baked potatoes instead of: French fries, Au Gratin, scalloped, or with heavy cheeses or cream toppings.
- Avoid or go lightly on high fat toppings for baked potatoes such as sour cream, etc.
- Try breakfast foods such as bagels, low-sugar cereals, pancakes, French toast, yogurt and oatmeal.
- Limit egg consumption for breakfast to 1-2 times/week.
- Choose salad items such as raw vegetables, beans, peas, dark green lettuce, cucumbers, and mushrooms. Avoid cheese and heavy dressings.
- Use clear dressings on salads.
- For dessert, try fruit, cottage cheese, yogurt, angel food cake, nuts, and seeds.
- Add fresh fruit to each meal.
- Eat plenty of complex carbohydrates – pasta, breads, cereals, grains, beans, peas, and rice.
- Choose pasta with tomato sauces instead of cream sauces.
- Choose whole wheat breads and crackers instead of white bread.

Restaurant eating tips:
- Not all Asian food is healthy. Many foods are fried and have high sodium content. Soy sauce is very high in sodium and can make you very thirsty. Stick with stir-fry dishes and steamed rice.
- Typically, most Vietnamese food is very healthy.
- If eating sushi, which is very healthy, make sure it is fresh and from a reputable restaurant.
- Refried beans are made with lard (animal fat). Fajitas are a good choice and very healthy. Minimize cheese, sour cream, and special sauces.
- Italian is a good choice, but go lightly on the alfredo sauces which are made with butter.
- Indian is also a good choice, but spicy.
- When in doubt about what meat to choose, pick chicken, fish, or seafood. Or, go vegetarian.