



Fuel for Sport

The first nutritional requirement for everyone, whatever their level of sporting ability, is a well-balanced diet that supplies the right amounts of energy and essential nutrients. Whether you are an athlete in training for

competitions, or someone who enjoys recreational sports or exercise, what you eat and drink is important

Getting the Balance in your Diet Right: Key Tips

- Eat a variety of foods.
- Eat plenty of starch-rich foods e.g. bread, pasta, rice and cereals. Choose high-fibre varieties where possible.
- Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day - fresh, frozen, canned, dried and juices all count.
- Cut down on the fat and fatty foods in your diet.
- Eat some protein-rich foods 2-3 times each day.
- Sweet, sugary foods should only be used in small quantities; they can be useful sources of carbohydrate if your energy requirements are high.
- Start refuelling with carbohydrate foods as soon as possible after exercise.
- Drink plenty of fluids during throughout the day as well as before, during and after exercise.

Fuel up on Carbohydrates

Carbohydrate is the most important fuel for an active person and is stored in the muscles as glycogen. To maximize your energy stores you need to keep your glycogen stores topped up each day. The best way to do this is to have a low-fat, high-carbohydrate snack or light meal 2-3 hours before exercise; this allows time for the stomach to empty before the event. Then start refuelling your energy stores as soon as you have finished exercising, how much you need will depend on the amount of exercise you do. Refuel with low-fat, high-carbohydrate snacks (see box).

Aim to consume 1g carbohydrate per kg body weight within the first 2 hours after exercise. If you are doing only light exercise then 50g carbohydrate should be enough (see table). Your main meals should also contain plenty of starchy rich foods.

For more specific information on carbohydrate requirements, see the website run by the Dietitians in Sport and Exercise Nutrition (DISEN) group of the BDA at www.disen.org.

Drink Plenty

It is important to drink before, during and after exercise - don't wait until you are thirsty as by then you will already be

Foods containing 50g of carbohydrate

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|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ■ 2 large bananas | ■ 8 tablespoons (200g) cooked pasta |
| ■ 3 slices thick sliced bread | ■ 4 tablespoons cooked rice |
| ■ 1 bagel | ■ 75g (1 sheet) noodles |
| ■ 2-3 slices malt loaf | ■ 1 medium jacket potato |
| ■ 500ml fruit juice | ■ 400g can baked beans or spaghetti |
| ■ 330ml bottle fruit smoothie | ■ 1 litre semi skimmed milk |
| ■ 1 large bowl (60g) breakfast cereal | ■ 800ml isotonic sports drink |
| ■ 15 dried apricots | |
| ■ 2 cereal bars | |
| ■ 6 jaffa cakes | |

dehydrated. Water is an excellent sports drink. If you are exercising hard, or your exercise lasts longer than an hour, choose dilute squash, dilute fruit juices, or a suitable sports drink. These will supply some carbohydrate as well as fluid. More specifically, as a general rule, two hours before exercise 400-600ml of fluid should be consumed, and during exercise 150-250ml of fluid should be consumed every 15-20 minutes, depending on tolerance. After exercise the athlete should drink adequate fluid to replace sweat losses during exercise.

What about Protein?

Strength and endurance athletes do have a higher requirement than the average person for protein; however requirements can generally be met by having a healthy balanced diet.

Muscle is gained through a combination of resistance exercise, and a diet containing adequate energy and carbohydrate to fuel the exercise. If you do not consume enough carbohydrate to fuel your muscles, the protein will be used instead.

At main meals make sure you have some protein e.g. meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and pulses, cheese, quorn, tofu and nuts.

Watch out for the Fat

It is also important to watch the amount of fat you eat, especially saturated fat. Look for the lower fat alternatives such as reduced-fat dairy products, use less oil in cooking, choose lean cuts of meats and be careful not to eat too many cakes, biscuits and crisps.

Supplements

Most people do not need to take supplements if they are eating a balanced diet. Athletes should consult with an accredited sports dietitian (ASD) before taking supplements of any kind. For more information see www.disen.org.

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