

SportsNutrition

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The Athlete's Kitchen

"What should I eat before I exercise?" That's a key question athletes ask me, a sport nutritionist. While they know the words *carbs*, *proteins* and *fats*, they often don't know how to translate those words into food choices. Hence, the goal of this article is to offer specific food suggestions to fit a variety of sports situations. (This is far from a complete list!) Please be sure to experiment to learn which foods settle best in your gut, don't "talk back" and enhance your performance.

Pre-event carbo-loading dinner:

#1. Pasta with tomato sauce, meatballs, green beans, French bread, lowfat/skim milk, frozen yogurt with strawberries.

#2. Turkey with potato, stuffing, lowfat gravy, winter squash, cranberry sauce, dinner rolls, apple crisp with reduced-fat ice cream.

Pre-game breakfast: 1 to 2 hours before, let's say, a 9:00 a.m. cross-country meet or soccer game:

Wheaties (or other dry cereal) with lowfat milk and banana; oatmeal with applesauce and brown sugar; cream of wheat with raisins; bagel or English muffin with peanut butter; poached eggs with two slices of toast; yogurt and granola.

Liquid "meals" if you have trouble digesting solid food

Fruit smoothie (milk, yogurt or juice blended with frozen berries, banana chunks), Carnation Instant Breakfast, Boost, Ensure, lowfat chocolate milk, vanilla pudding, pureed peaches.

Brunch 4 hours before, let's say, a 1:00 football or hockey game

Heftier portions of any of the above breakfast options
French toast with cinnamon sugar, berries, breakfast ham
Pancakes with maple syrup, scrambled eggs, fruit cup
Veggie omelet with non-greasy hash brown potatoes, toast
Breakfast burrito (scrambled eggs, lowfat cheese, salsa wrapped in a flour tortilla) plus fruit cup and orange juice

Four o'clock pre-game dinner before a 7:00 pm basketball game

Any of the carbo-loading dinners or brunch suggestions
Cheese ravioli, tomato sauce, peas, fruit salad, sugar cookie
Grilled chicken (small portion) with baked potato/lowfat sour cream, steamed carrots, bread, blueberry cobbler, lowfat milk (or milk alternatives: lactose-free milk, soy milk)
Turkey sub with lettuce, tomato, lowfat mayonnaise, baked potato chips, vanilla yogurt and oatmeal-raisin cookie
Wonton soup, stir-fried chicken with veggies, steamed rice, lo mein noodles, pineapple chunks, fortune cookie

Grab 'n Go Snack: 100 to 300 non-perishable calories within the hour pre-exercise, stored in your desk or gym bag:

Nature Valley Granola Bar, Quaker Chewy Bar, Nutri-Grain Cereal Bar, Fig Newtons, Teddy Grahams, graham crackers, Nilla Wafers, animal crackers, hard or soft pretzels, cinnamon raisin bagel, snack-box raisins, trail mix

Energy Bar options to fit assorted dietary preferences:

Good tasting, all natural ingredients: Zing Bar, Clif Nectar Bar, Lara Bar, Perfect 10 Bar, Odwalla Bar, KIND Bar, NRG-Bar, PowerBar Harvest

Gluten free bars: Bora Bora Bars, Lara Bars, PURE Bar, First Endurance Bar, Hammer Bar, Wings of Nature Bar; Zing Bar

Food Suggestions for Hungry Athletes

Nut-free: Metaballs, AllerEnergy Bar (www.peanutfreeplanet.com)

Raw: Raw Revolution Bar, PURE bar

Vegan: Pure Fit, Lara Bar, Hammer Bar, Vega Whole Food Raw Energy Bar, Clif Builder's Bar, Perfect 10, ReNew Life Organic Energy Bar

Yummy organic options by entrepreneurs who will appreciate your support: NRG-Bar (www.NRG-Bar.com; developed by an Ironman triathlete), Olympic bar (www.OlympicGranola.com; developed by a dad with eight kids), ZingBar (www.zingbar.com; developed by two dietitians who believe food should taste great!)

Pre-exercise "quick fixes" *These choices lack nutritional value but are easy to digest, provide the quick energy the body wants, and when eaten five minutes pre-exercise, are unlikely to create rebound hypoglycemia (also known as a "sugar crash").*

Pop-Tarts, Nabisco Sugar Wafers, Rice Krispie Treats, toast with jelly, marshmallows, gum drops, jelly beans, licorice, York Peppermint Patties, Jello, marshmallows, sports drinks (Gatorade, PowerAde, etc.), fruit juice, sweetened iced tea, defizzed Coke, homemade "energy drink"

**To avoid red dye and questionable ingredients, make your own energy drink. Simply add 7 packets (teaspoons) of sugar to 8 ounces of coffee. You'll end up with 80 mg caffeine and 110 calories, similar to what's in a Red Bull but at a fraction of the price!*

Pre-exercise high sodium snacks *for athletes who sweat heavily. Consuming a salty food before exercise helps retain water in your body and delays becoming dehydrated.*

Pretzels, salt bagel, baked chips, ramen noodles, chicken noodle soup, canned broth (chicken, beef or vegetable), beef consomme (jellied); boiled and salted red potatoes or potato chunks, ham & cheese sub with mustard, V-8 Juice.

Fuel during exercise that lasts for 2 to 4 hours

Buy sports clothes with pockets, so you can carry these with you.
Gummi bears, Starburst Fruit Chews, jelly beans, licorice, butterscotch candies, Peppermint Patties, Tootsie Rolls, Whoppers Malted Milk Balls, mini MilkyWay Bars, GoGurt
Engineered options: Gu, Carb-Boom!, Clif Shot, Clif Shot Bloks, Gu Chomps, Honey Stinger, Hammer Gel, Jelly Belly Sports Beans, Sharkies, PowerBar Energy Blasts

Fuel during exercise that lasts >4 hours, such as a long bike ride, cross-country ski, or adventure race

Any of the above snacks that you might consume during 2 to 4 hours of exercise, plus more substantial fare:
Peanut butter & jelly on bread, bagel or flour tortilla (wrapped "burrito style" to keep the jelly from oozing out); gorp (raisins, peanuts, M&M mixture), trail mix, ham and cheese in a pita pocket, beef jerky (for sodium), noodle soup, sweetened condensed milk, chocolate bars ... any food that tastes good, settles well and helps you survive the event!

Nancy Clark, MS, RD, CSSD (Board Certified Specialist in Sports Dietetics) counsels both casual and competitive athletes in her practice at Healthworks, the premier fitness center in Chestnut Hill MA (617-383-6100). For more information, read her *Sports Nutrition Guidebook* and *food guides for new runners, marathoners, and soccer*: www.nancyclarkrd.com. See also sportsnutritionworkshop.com.