

What Swimmers Should Know About Pre-Competition Meals

The question, “What should I eat before practice or competition?” is commonly asked by swimmers. Unfortunately, they often receive incorrect advice about pre-event nutrition and as a result experience fatigue in the middle of the meet or get upset stomachs.

The pre-event meal serves two purposes. One is to keep the athlete from feeling hungry and the other is to supply the athlete with sufficient energy and fluids for practice and competition.

The pre-event meal should include foods that are high in carbohydrates, such as breads, rice, pasta, cereals, bagels, fruits such as apples, oranges, and bananas, or vegetables such as potatoes, corn and peas.

For swim meets that last all day, obtaining nutritious foods may be difficult. Swimmers should carefully monitor the amount of time between meals and competition when choosing food at all-day events. Here are some suggestions we feel you as a swimmer should follow:

If there are 3-4 hours before your competition, the following alternatives would be appropriate:

- Fruit and vegetable juices and fresh fruit, and/or
- Breads, bagels with light spread of peanut butter, cream cheese, or 1 slice of cheese, or
- Sandwiches with a small amount of lean meat, lowfat cheese and mustard, or
- A bowl of whole grain or high-fiber cold cereal (or hot cereal like oatmeal), or
- 6 cups of commercial carbohydrate beverage such as Gatorade, Exceed, Powerade, etc, or 3 carbohydrate bars (PowerBar) with 3 cups water.

If there are 2-3 hours before your competition, the following alternatives would be appropriate:

- Fresh fruit and fresh or vegetable juices and/or
- Breads, bagels, or muffins with a limited amount of butter or cream cheese, lowfat yogurt, or...
- 4 cups of a commercial carbohydrate beverage such as Gatorade, Powerade, etc., 2 carbohydrate bars (PowerBar) with 2 cups of water now and the same thing 1 hour before competing.

If there is 1 hour or less before your competition, the following alternatives would be appropriate:

- Fruit and vegetable juices such as orange, tomato, or V-8 juices, and/or
- Fresh fruit such as apples, watermelon, peaches, grapes, or oranges, or...
- 1-1/2 cups of commercial carbohydrate beverage such as Gatorade, Powerade, etc, or a carbohydrate bar (PowerBars) with 1 cup of water.

PLEASE NOTE:

Each swimmer is different. Do not try something new before a major competition. Try pre-competition meals before practices so you can determine what works best for you. If something upsets your stomach, or doesn't seem to give you the energy you need, try one of the other alternatives.

By the time you get to your championship meet, you should know what your choices (have a few choices in case one is unavailable) are and have confidence in how you perform when eating them.

NUTRITION TIPS

To help you decide on proper nutrition during our season, here are some tips on what is good to include in your breakfast, lunch and dinner, as well as what you should avoid.

Breakfast

DO

- Eat hot cereals like oatmeal and oat bran.
- Select whole-grain or high-fiber cold cereals.
- Eat breads, including muffins, biscuits, and bagels.
- Choose eggs up to two or three times weekly.
- Try milk, skim or lowfat is best.
- Drink hot beverages such as hot chocolate and hot apple cider.
- Eat pancakes, waffles and French toast.
- Choose fat-free toppings like syrups and jams as an alternative to margarine and butter.
- Choose fruit, including fresh, canned, and fruit juices.

DON'T

- Eat sausage, ham or bacon more than once a week.
- Opt for eggs every day.
- Choose sugary children's cereals.
- Choose fast food breakfast sandwiches and fat-laden croissants.
- Use too much margarine or butter.
- Eat doughnuts or pastries daily.
- Skip breakfast.

Lunch

DO

- Pack a lunch when possible.
- Choose whole-grain breads.
- Eat hearty soups and stews.
- Use mustard and ketchup as condiments.
- Choose a hamburger over hotdogs.
- Choose a baked potato over French fries.
- Eat pasta as much as you like, but choose tomato sauces rather than cream sauces.
- Try pizza without fatty meat toppings.
- Choose lean meats like turkey over salami or bologna.

DON'T

- Eat fast-food meals too frequently.
- Eat fried foods like fish'n'chips too often.
- Overuse mayonnaise or salad dressings.
- Eat fatty and salty luncheon meats too often.
- Choose prepared salads containing a lot of mayonnaise or salad dressing.
- Skip lunch.

Dinner

DO

- Eat pasta dishes.
- Try Chinese food with rice and fresh vegetables.
- Select fish often. Broiled or poached is best.
- Trim visible fat from meats and remove skin from poultry.
- Have soups, salads and plenty of vegetables.
- Eat as much bread as you like.
- Include potatoes, rice or beans when available.
- Choose fresh fruit, yogurt or jello for dessert.

DON'T

- Choose deep-fried meals more than once or twice a week.
- Eat high-fat meals like hot dogs or sausages in excess (or fast food hamburgers).
- Choose meals with heavy cream sauces or gravies.
- Ruin a baked potato or bread with too much butter.
- Have cakes, ice cream and pies every night.

Snacks and Beverages

DO

- Drink 8 to 10 glasses of clear fluids each day.
- Drink fruit juices, plain water, hot ciders, and soups.
- Have rolls, muffins, and breads.
- Snack on popcorn, pretzels, and breadsticks.
- Pack nutritious snacks like fruit, raisins and nuts.

DON'T

- Drink soft drinks.
- Count on potato or tortilla chips as good snacks.
- Eat cupcakes or cream-filled pastries when hungry.
- Eat ice cream, cakes or candies in excess