

SWIM-EATS (SWIM –MEETS)
(High Performance Nutrition for Swim Meets)
A Guide for Swimmers, Coaches, Parents and
Clubs
PART ONE
by Wayne Goldsmith

Nutrition is an important area of successful sports performance in any sport. Swimmers need to eat nutritious foods to compete and train to the best of their ability. Coaches need to ensure that swimmers are eating well and rehydrating to complement their training program. Parents want to help their kids achieve their goals and are keen to support them in every possible way.

Swim Clubs and swimming organisations, selling food and drink at Swim Meets need to ensure that a variety of highly nutritious healthy options that can still generate income and raise funds are available to the swimmers.

Swim Meets, Swim Competitions and Swimming Championships are the places where all the vested interests in swimming nutrition come together: swimmers, coaches, parents and administrators. Everyone is looking for the same thing: how can we maximise the opportunity presented by the competition?

Swimmers want to maximise the opportunity of swimming fast at the Meet.

Coaches want to maximise the opportunities for the individual swimmers and team to compete successfully.

Parents want their kids to make the most of the competitive opportunity and swim well.

Administrators want to maximise the opportunity to generate income from the fund raising activities at the Meet.

Is it possible to develop an overall nutrition strategy to meet the needs of everyone?

Swimmers

A feature of successful athletes in any sport is how they take responsibility for their own performances. As swimmers get older and approach open level competition they should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own diet and nutrition program – to become coach and parent independent as far as food preparation and consumption are concerned.

On Meet day, swimmers should check their own bags to make sure all the fuel they will need over the day has been packed. This includes not only an adequate supply of food and drinks for the Meet day but enough nutritious snacks to cover the crucial post race recovery period. If for example, the last race of the day is 4:00pm and the swimmer is unlikely to eat dinner before 7:00pm, it is important that foods like fruit, sandwiches and other nutritious snacks are available to munch on between 4 and 7pm. (It is unlikely you can “ruin the appetite” of a competitive swimmer!).

Athletes, by their actions, are above average people. They choose to push themselves to their limits and in doing so are “high performance” human beings. Just as High Performance motor vehicles use a high grade, high octane fuel, “high performance humans” need the best possible fuel to perform at their best.

However, athletes do not need to live a hermit type existence and abstain from all Take Away Foods, snacks, nibbles, lollies etc. The pressures of advertising and their peer group will make a totally junk food free existence near impossible for kids in the current times. The goal should be to practice sensible nutrition habits the majority of the time, to understand the basics of high performance eating and to be aware of the link between good food and fast swimming.

Immediately after racing, **DRINK**. Water is perfect, or try other fluids such as sports drink, cordial or fruit juice. Also eat something light within 10 minutes of finishing the race. This is the time when your body is best able to absorb and utilise new fuels.

If the Meet is two days or longer in duration, **RECOVERY NUTRITION** is an important part of racing successfully. Recovery nutrition is about planning an eating and drinking strategy that helps your body:

1. **Recover from the physical stresses of racing;**
2. **Prepare for the racing to come.**

This is also called the **REPAIR – PREPARE** approach to Swim Meet eating.

Recovery nutrition is a technique which provides the swimmer’s body with what they need to recover (eg carbohydrates to replace used up energy, proteins for muscle building and repair) and prepare for the next day of competition. In between races, recovery nutrition is about replenishing energy stores quickly and effectively so that the next race can be completed at maximum speed. Foods that aid in a recovery nutrition program between races include fruit, blended fruit packs, tinned fruits and sports drinks – things that are easy to digest and absorb into the body. To maximise the impact of these “recovery foods” they need to be eaten or drunk as soon as possible after racing.

A key element of a successful Swim Meet nutrition program is **EATING TIMING**. Swimmers need to ensure that their eating program is as finely tuned as their training and racing schedule. If competing early in the morning some swimmers may find it necessary to rise early (3-4 hours before warm up) eat, then go back to bed for a little more rest. Other athletes may chose to eat, then go for a short walk or jog to start the warm up / race preparation process going.

Competition Schedule	What to Eat	When to Eat
Early Morning Heats (8: 00am – 10:00am)	Breakfast – Light meal Complex Carbohydrates the focus	6:00am-7:00am
Afternoon Heats / Semi Finals / Finals (2:00pm- 4:00pm)	Light lunch – Salad and Sandwiches. Cooked lunch of rice or pasta.	11:00am-1:00pm depending on start time. Allow approx 2 hours between eating and racing
Evening Events (6:00pm-	Late Afternoon Meal	4:00pm – 5:00pm

9:00pm)	(Early dinner). Small quantities of rice, pasta, vegetables. Bread, bread rolls. Fruit.	
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An Example of a Competition Eating Schedule

An important aspect of being a senior athlete is knowing what foods help you to swim at your best and when to eat them.

In minor Meets and lead up competitions try keeping a **NUTRITION DIARY** for the day before, the days of competition and the day after the Meet. Record what you eat, when you eat, how much you eat, how you felt and how you raced. By keeping the nutrition diary, you can evaluate what eating strategy works best for you.

TONY JOHNSON'S MEET NUTRITION DIARY – 2 day meet		
What I Ate and Drank	When I ate it	Comments
Coco Pops, Chocolate	Breakfast (around 7:00am)	Felt flat in warm up, raced poorly in 100 backstroke.
Fruit, Water, ½ a chicken salad sandwich	10:00am (30 minutes before 200 freestyle)	Felt better.
Pasta, Potato in Jacket, Fruit, Water, Juice	Lunch (around noon)	Raced ten minutes after big lunch. Felt heavy in the water and lethargic
Apple	2:00pm	Fired up. Felt strong.
Rice dish, vegetables, juice, ice cream and banana cake	6:00pm Dinner	I was starving!!! Ate everything in sight.
Wholegrain toast, Yoghurt, Fruit and juice	Breakfast (6:00am)	Felt great. The earlier breakfast really helped!

An Example of a typical Meet Nutrition Diary

Coaches:

Ensure you understand the basics of good nutrition and plan an effective education program for your swimmers. This includes a program of classroom education, Supermarket visits, teaching swimmers to read food labels and educating them about what's in food. Senior swimmers need to learn to cook a few basic meals (for example pasta and sauce, vegetarian fried rice, potatoes in their jackets and apple crumble) utilising low fat cooking and food preparation techniques. Parents of young swimmers also need to be aware of how to cook with less added fats and oils.

If you as a coach lack the necessary knowledge to take an active role in the nutrition education program of your club, enlist the services of a qualified sports dietician or sports nutritionist.

If a sports nutrition specialist is not easily available, read one of the many good books on the topic and prepare an athlete and parent nutrition education program that is swimming specific, easy to understand and simple to apply. Alternately approach the local hospital dietician and ask them to help out with your education program.

An important area of nutrition education is to educate parents. Remember that in general **KIDS DON'T SHOP and KIDS DON'T COOK!** Educating young swimmers is of limited value unless the parents are similarly educated and have the commitment to support their children's healthy eating program.

Do a pre-meet checklist for swimmers and parents to follow AND ask them to sign it before the swimmer leaves home for the pool.

JULIE SMITH'S SWIM MEET CHECKLIST FOR OCTOBER 16TH		
Food / Drink	How much?	Packed in my Swim Bag (Yes or No)
Water	1 litre	Yes
Juice	2 x 200 mls	Yes
Fruit	3 pieces	Yes
Sandwich	2 (chicken and salad)	Yes
Low Fat Fruit Yoghurt	One tub	Yes
Pre-cooked Pasta with tomato based sauce	250 gms in a sealed container	Yes
BAG CHECKED	Mum / Dad (sign)	Swimmer (sign)

Swimmer's Swim Meet Nutrition Checklist

As an alternative, have a team breakfast on the morning of the Meet. If competing close to home, have the team breakfast in the Club Meeting room. Away from home, find a pleasant venue for the Team breakfast (beach, park, near a river) with an alternate site nominated in case of cold or rainy weather.

Ask each family to bring something for the team breakfast, (give them a list of what you want) – Smiths bring cereal, Jones family brings milk and Yoghurt, Wilsons bring Fruit and Juice etc. At the very least you can then be certain that the team has had one nutritious meal before competing. For a Medal winning Meet morning breakfast try some of these suggestions:

- ☺ Cereals (not the popular Chocolate or sugary ones). Try WeetBix, Vita Brits, Sustain, Just Right, Sports Plus.
- ☺ Reduced fat milk – e.g. Shape, Physical, Rev, Hi-Lo
- ☺ Low fat fruit yoghurt.
- ☺ Selection of fresh and/or tinned fruit (in natural juice). Sliced banana goes great on Weetbix and Vita Brits!
- ☺ Selection of bread, toast, crumpets, muffins, and spreads such as margarine, jam, vegemite and honey.
- ☺ Drinks – fruit juices, water, and milo.
- ☺ Spaghetti, baked beans or creamed corn on toast.
- ☺ Poached eggs or grilled tomatoes on toast.
- ☺ Pancakes or pikelets (with small amounts of syrup).

The team breakfast is also a great way to build team unity and go over team strategies for the Meet.

For a few laughs, select a swimmer at “random” and empty the contents of their swim bag in front of the rest of the team to check if they have packed it with all the healthy, nutritious food and drink they will need for the Meet. (By “random” it is a good idea to pre-select someone you know has done the right thing rather than publicly embarrass someone who hasn’t). You can do the same fun educational exercise and check the swimmer’s swim bag for other essential items, eg cap, goggles, towel, sun screen, hat etc etc to ensure they are packing for success!

If travelling to a Meet where you are likely to be arriving early in the morning or late in the evening have swimmers carry their first two meals with them. This reduces the temptation to seek Fast Food for dinner or breakfast. Arriving in a competition venue in the **evening** means that the only food outlets open will be Home Delivery Pizza and the Hamburger chains. Arriving at the competition venue early in the **morning** means coffee and donuts or the Fast Food chains.

Weeks of hard work and tough training may all be for nothing if the final two meals before competition are high fat, high salt and high sugar food choices.

Have swimmers follow a set nutrition and rehydration routine around every race. Try the **R-D-T-E-R** routine (**RACE-DRINK-TALK-EAT-REST**). Swimmers race, then grab their drink bottles and take a sip, go the coach for the post race review, have a bite to eat then rest.

Keep your eyes open! Swimmers who are poorly prepared and have not brought healthy foods from home will be rushing to the Canteen or Shop for high fat / high sugar products early in the day.

Be aware of gimmicks and misinformation. Parents and swimmers can be easily influenced by the media and advertising campaigns to buying items that are not really high performance fuels. Food supplements, vitamins and minerals and fashionable products advertised by successful athletes rarely deliver on their promises of improved performance.

Parents’ vulnerability to a quick fix, instant success products and promises means that coaches need to focus on parents at every stage of their nutrition education programs.

Swimmers don’t always notice it, but sweating occurs when training and racing – even though the activity happens in the water. It is vital that a good supply of cool water, cordial, sports drink or juice is on hand at Swim Meets. Purchase a team 40-50 litre capacity Cooler, give the team captain or a committee member the responsibility for filling it and take it to every Meet (and also for cleaning it **AFTER** every Meet).

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competitions and carnivals):
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Parents:

Parents play a significant role in the nutrition and lifestyle habits of swimmers (their children). Parents can have an important impact on their child's eating choices in many ways:

By setting an example with their own diet. It is well established that children, particularly young children are influenced by their parents behaviours. This applies to social behaviours, beliefs and lifestyle habits. Parents who consistently eat high fat, high salt, high sugar, low fibre foods are setting a decidedly unhealthy example for their kids to follow. (This also applies to smoking and whilst this is not strictly a nutrition issue it is very definitely a health issue).

By purchasing healthy nutritious food. This is one key area where parents can directly influence the nutrition program of their children. In most households mum and dad are responsible for selecting and buying the families food each week. In this regard, mum and dad can be positive role models, or quite easily become a negative influence on the family's eating habits. If you don't buy chocolate biscuits, frozen pizza and sugary breakfast cereals, the kids can't eat them. **It then becomes a matter of a battle of wills between parents and kids.** The pressures of television advertising and the influence of their friends and peer group may have children demanding non healthy food choices, but in the family home, parents should take the hard option of insisting on high performance nutrition.

(Try not to go grocery shopping when you are hungry. Research suggests that if you shop when you are hungry you are more likely to make poor food selections – usually of the high fat variety).

By not promising Junk food as rewards for good performances. This is crucial. Most diets in Western Society fail. Recent statistics suggest that over 90% of people trying to lose weight do not achieve their goals. Much of the blame comes from the way we approach "treats" with children.

As a child, everyone has had an Auntie or Uncle or Grandparent say, "You're such a good boy or good girl, here's a chocolate", or "Your school grades are so good, let's celebrate with pizza and garlic bread". From an early age, this **"do something good – eat something bad as a reward"** mentality develops.

Adults who fail in their efforts to lose weight often do so because they reward any weight loss with junk food, chocolates, cake etc. This is an extension of the eating habits learned and reinforced in childhood.

Be wary of products promising quick easy results. All parents want the best for their children and as a result are vulnerable to advertising and marketing of sports nutrition products in the belief that they are helping their children.

The MID MEET MAIN MEAL - MMMM:

Often at two day meets with families travelling away from home, **the “MID MEET MAIN MEAL”** is the most important eating occasion. Generally the MID MEET MAIN MEAL is the Saturday evening meal that swimmers and families share after a full day of competition (Day One). This meal is a time for everyone to unwind and talk about swim times, races and the things that happened on day One and to fuel up for the second day of competition.

There are several options for the “MMMM”. If dining out, coaches, swimmers and parents need to be aware of the positives and negatives of their eating options and be prepared to exercise control and discipline where unsuitable foods are available.

Dining Option	Food Selection	Positives	Negatives
PIZZA BUFFET	Pizza, Garlic Bread, Pasta, Fries, Salads, Desserts, Soft Drinks	Quick, Inexpensive. Wide choice. Salads usually available. No need to dress up.	Pizza is high fat. Easy access to large amounts of high fat foods demands great discipline from swimmers. Opportunity for eating too much and too much of the wrong foods. Dessert bar is too tempting!!! High salt content.
SIZZLER / BUFFET STYLE RESTAURANTS	Just about anything	Quick, inexpensive, wide choice. Salad bars usually great. No need to dress up.	Access to large quantities of high fat foods (desserts, rich pasta sauces, potato skins) a problem.
ITALIAN RESTAURANT	Pasta, Breads, Veal, Meat dishes, chicken dishes	Can be an excellent high carbohydrate meal. Pasta, salad with no dressing and plain bread is an excellent combination.	High fat cream based sauces, garlic bread with lots of butter. Some meats (Italian sausages) will be high fat and high salt. Dressing up can be an inconvenience.
ASIAN STYLE RESTAURANTS	Noodles, meat fish and chicken dishes, rice, vegetables.	Can be an excellent high carbohydrate	High fat fried entrees (spring rolls, dim sum). High salt meat

		meal. Stir fry cooking techniques result in full flavoured highly nutritious dishes.	dishes common. Dressing up can be an inconvenience.
TAKE AWAY CHICKEN OUTLETS / HAMBURGER CHAINS	Chicken (fried, deep fried, roasted, baked), vegetables, fries, salads. Hamburgers, fries,	Quick, inexpensive. Chicken Barbequed over hot coals and with skin removed is an excellent choice. Baked potatoes and vegetables if available a good preference over fries.	High fat and salt crumbed or fried chicken. Fries usually accompany most dishes. Salads usually pre-prepared with high fat dressings. Burgers are usually high fat and “special” sauces also high in fats. Small cut French fries very high in fat and salt.

Typical food choices (Take Aways) available for Mid Meet Main Meals

Be prepared to ask the restaurant for changes and modifications to their printed menu. For example ask for salads with no dressing (or have the dressing served on the side). Ask for meals to be cooked with less oil and for dishes to be prepared with little or no salt. If you must have salad dressing or salt for taste, adding them yourself means you can control your intake of these products.

Get in the habit of asking waiters and waitresses how the food will be cooked BEFORE you order it. Be confident knowing that as you are paying for the food, you have the right to have input into how it will be prepared, (just beware of temperamental chefs!!!).

When selecting the venue for the “MMMM” do not allow swimmers performances to dictate where and what you will eat. The “**if you do a PB we will all go to a popular hamburger restaurant**” promise made by parents to swimmers may achieve short term success but it leads to long term eating lifestyle problems.

Parents – PLEASE – do not reward GREAT SWIMMING with JUNK FOOD.

An alternative to eating out with the team for the “MMMM” is the team dinner or team barbeque that is catered by the families of swimmers and by club management. The great positive is that the coach and families have a good deal more control over the quantity and quality of food being selected and eaten by the swim team. The down side is that the parent cooked “MMMM” requires more planning and forethought as foods may need to be transported from home.

This does not present any real problems if travelling relatively short distances to the Meet by car, but is difficult to manage if longer journeys to distant competitions are necessary.

If preparing meals for a team when competing away from home, delegate the responsibility for the various contents of the meal to swimmers’ families, eg John’s

dad buys the salads and cuts up the vegetables, Julie's mum leaves the Meet early to buy fresh seasonal fruit and prepare a fruit platter, etc. Often the MMMM is a last minute, unplanned and unco-ordinated meal leaving the swimmers with few options and what options they do have are usually the Fast Food ones.

A little planning will go a long way to ensuring a successful Meet and a sensible high performance nutrition program for the swimmers!

Glucose Tablets. Parents are often taken in by the “high energy” promises and packaging of glucose products in the belief that it will give their child a lift or boost on race day. These products are very high in sugar (the “OSE” on the end of food ingredients identifies it as sugar – maltOSE, fructOSE, dextrOSE etc). These products are of doubtful, if any, value.

Sports Drink. The marketing of sports drinks promotes the idea that drinking them will provide a “boost” or make a big impact on the performance of athletes. Whilst sports drinks do appear to have an important role in post race recovery, they are not a miracle product that will compensate for poor dietary choices. If intending to use a sports drink on race day, swimmers should experiment with the different brands, concentrations and quantities in training to see what works best for them.

Chocolate Bars. Another great swimming myth is the “Chocolate Bar rush”. Often parents will give their children chocolate before a race to try and catch a sugar “rush” which will give them an edge in racing. This again is not correct and in fact, the chocolate bars may impact on blood sugars to an extent that the swimmers perform poorly.

Clubs and Caterers:

The greatest challenge for Swim Clubs and swimming organisations is to provide healthy food options at swim Meets that also generate profit. For most clubs their single most important fund raising event on the annual program is when they host a swim Meet. The temptation is to sell the foods that are easiest to prepare and can generate the highest profits for the club. Pre frozen pies, sausage rolls, chips and other fried foods can generate a high profit but at what cost to the performance (and health) of the swimmers.

When catering for swim meets try to provide a range of healthy, nutritious foods for swimmers to snack on over the day. This includes providing swimmers with adequate fluids, other than soft drinks before during and after competition.

Typically the foods that are available at Swim Meets are high in salt, high in sugar, low in fibre, high in fat and low in complex carbohydrate are easy to sell, easy to keep warm, easy to store, taste great and make good profits for the club.

One idea for clubs might be to allocate a room (or tent) with a cafeteria / buffet style food serving area for swimmers to access. Athletes pay a small amount (three to five dollars) to enter the buffet area and fill a plate with as much healthy food as they can carry. This is an easy way to provide quick service to swimmers and provide a variety of food choices (and serving sizes). It is also cost effective as the bulk of the food choices can be salads, vegetables and breads.

Some SWIM EATS buffet ideas include:

Bread and bread rolls, pita breads, Lebanese bread, Turkish bread, and French sticks. Try a mixture of white, wholemeal, multi grain and light rye to encourage choice. Leave the breads unbuttered to try and encourage a low fat approach to swim Meet eating.

Things to put on and in the breads include:

- ✓ Lean meat/ham/chicken.
- ✓ Reduced fat cheese in slices or grated.
- ✓ Tinned fish like Tuna or Salmon. The fish should be in brine or water – not oil or mayonnaise.
- ✓ Egg (hard-boiled and sliced).
- ✓ Lots and Lots of Salad choices – tomato, lettuce (all varieties available), grated carrot, sprouts, beetroot, coleslaw, cucumber, avocado, pineapple, nuts, dried fruits. Be inventive!!!! Try to limit shop prepared salads that may be dressed in mayonnaise high in fats and oils.

- ✓ For desserts:
- ✓ Muffins – e.g. oat and honey, Fruit muffins - banana, date and walnut, strawberry, blueberry. Fruit cake, banana cake and carrot cake may be a good alternative – (try to get them made with low fat techniques).
- ✓ Fresh fruit – Whatever is in season and lots of it.

- ✓ Drinks:
- ✓ Water, Fruit Juice, Cordial.

HOT CATERING

Swim Clubs often run barbeques or prepare hot foods for sale at Meets. The challenge here again is to provide a wide range of choice, offer a selection of healthy nutritious high performance foods yet maximise fund raising.

Traditional Hot Food	Healthy Alternative	Cooking / Serving Ideas
Sausages / High Fat Meats fried in oil	Lean meats, chicken breasts, Grilled or Chargrilled if possible	Trim fat off meats and remove skin from chicken
Pre packaged Hamburgers	Homemade Hamburgers with lean mince (Grilled), Vegetable burgers.	Use low fat mince and avoid coating the outside with breadcrumbs
Chips or Fries	Baked Potatoes in their skins (unpeeled)	Serve with some low fat cheese or natural yoghurt
Hot Dogs	Lean, grilled sausages	Serve on a wholemeal or multi grain bread roll
Pies and Sausage Rolls	Vegetable Quiche	Made with fresh vegetables, eggs and low fat dairy products. Herbs for flavour.

Some ideas for Hot Catering at Swim Meets

Other ideas for hot catering include:

Pasta with low fat, tomato based sauces. This is a very cheap hot meal, easy to prepare and has a good profit margin (\$1.00 - \$2.00 per bowl or plate). Serve with salad and fresh bread.

Rice (using low fat cooking techniques) stir fried with lots of fresh vegetables. Curries, stews, casseroles with low fat meats, fresh vegetables and cooked with little or no oil. Serve the dish a 1-4 ration with rice, pasta or noodles, eg one scoop of curry / stew / casserole – four scoops of rice. Again this dish is a very profitable one for the club bank balance (\$1.00 - \$2.00 per bowl or plate).

Kebabs / shashliks /meat sticks - Cooked on skewers with alternating two vegetable pieces / one meat piece, eg Slice of red capsicum / slice of green capsicum / piece of chicken (skin removed) / small onion / ¼ tomato / piece of chicken.

Apple / berry crumble with low fat ice cream / fruit yoghurt.

Fresh fruit for dessert.

Healthy eating is only part of the total performance package of any athlete. Just as having a great race start is not enough to win races without the skills, techniques, mental strengths and fitness level required to complete the distance, eating well by itself will not make you a great swimmer.

An attitude of high performance eating will however go a long way to making you a high performance athlete.

Wayne Goldsmith
MOREGOLD SPORTS PTY LTD
MOREGOLD@BIGPOND.COM