

Eating before you exercise is important to prevent fatigue. It also helps you to exercise longer, more intensely, and can make it feel easier.

Well-chosen and well-timed foods and drinks will keep your blood glucose (sugar) levels stable, keep you hydrated, and give you the energy you need to exercise so you can perform your best.

Steps you can take

Planning Your Pre-Exercise Meals and Snacks

What foods you choose and how much you eat before you exercise depends on when, how long, and how intense your exercise or event will be. With time and practice, you can find what works best for you. Here are some tips to consider:

- Eat 1-4 hours before you exercise or compete. The longer you have before you exercise, the bigger your meal or snack can be because you will have more time to digest it. The aim is to eat enough to feel satisfied but not full by the time you start your exercise or event. If your exercise is intense, a smaller meal may be better because it may keep you from getting an upset stomach. Listen to your body. You may be able to eat more than others before you exercise.⁵
- Include carbohydrate-rich foods in your meals and snacks. Carbohydrates provide the fuel you will need for your brain and working muscles. Good choices include:
 - whole grain bread, pitas, bagels, wraps, and crackers
 - rice, pasta, quinoa, couscous, barley, or other grains
 - oatmeal or other whole grain cereal
 - fruit like bananas, oranges, apples, pears, grapes, cantaloupe, and watermelon
 - 100% fruit juice
 - starchy vegetables like potatoes, sweet potatoes, yams, winter squash, and corn.

Non-starchy vegetables, such as salad greens, broccoli, asparagus, green beans, celery, and cucumber, are nutritious and provide water for hydration. They are, however, low in carbohydrates and do not provide the energy you need to fuel your body. Some are also gaseous. Combine them with carbohydrate-rich foods listed above to give you the energy that you need.

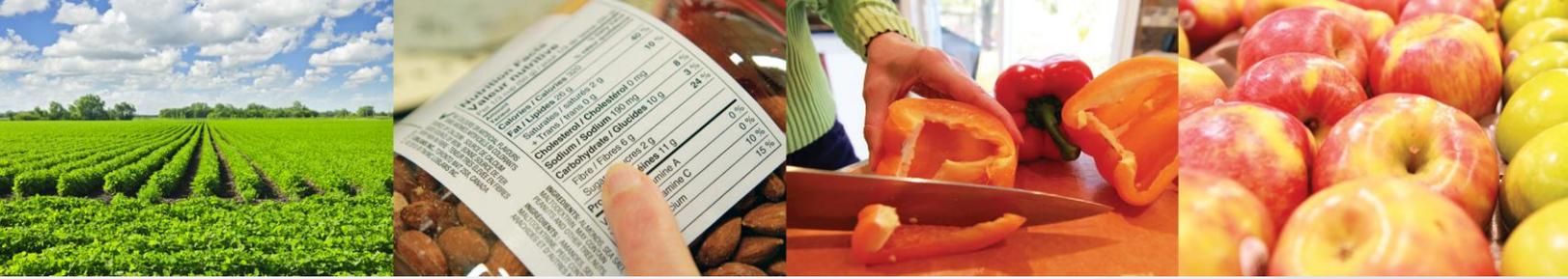


- Include protein-rich foods in your meals and snacks. Protein can help you to feel satisfied longer. Good choices include:
 - lean meats, poultry, fish, and seafood
 - milk, yogurt, cheese, and cottage cheese
 - eggs
 - nuts and seeds and their butters
 - beans, peas, and lentils
 - tofu, soy products, and fortified soy beverage.
- Choose foods that are lower in fat and fibre. Fat and fibre are digested slowly and foods high in fibre can produce gas or bloating, both of which could impact your ability to exercise and perform at your best. Choose skim or 1% milk rather than homo milk, plain o-shaped cereal rather than a high-fibre wheat bran cereal or tuna and pasta rather than a hamburger with double cheese.
- Drink enough fluids so that you can start your exercise or event well hydrated. Choose water most of the time, but 100% fruit juice, milk, tea, coffee, and sports drinks also count as fluid.
- Select foods that you know you tolerate. It is important to try different foods well before you exercise or before a competition or event to make sure they are well accepted and that you feel “okay.” This is especially important if you feel nervous or tend to get an upset stomach before your event.

Sample Pre-Exercise Meals

Here are examples of meals you can try 1 to 4 hours before you start to exercise. Choose portions that will satisfy your hunger.

- whole grain cereal or oatmeal with low-fat milk and mixed berries
- whole wheat toast or bagel with peanut butter and a banana
- whole wheat tortilla wrap with chicken or turkey, lettuce, tomato, green peppers, and cucumber
- stir-fry made with cooked brown rice or quinoa and tofu, lean beef, chicken, or shrimp, and a mix of your favourite vegetables
- baked sweet potato, grilled fish or chicken, and cooked vegetables.



Pre-Exercise Snacks

Consider these healthy, carbohydrate-rich, easy-to-digest, pre-exercise snacks when you have 2 hours or less before you exercise:

- whole wheat toast or English muffin with low fat cheese
- yogurt with fruit
- medium apple or banana with or without trail mix
- smoothie made with low-fat milk and fruit.

Special Considerations

What if I don't feel like eating before I exercise in the morning?

Exercising on an empty stomach could hurt your performance. However, some people do not like the feeling of having food in their stomach when they exercise first thing in the morning. It can make them feel nauseous or sick. If you struggle with eating solids before you exercise, try a liquid meal like a smoothie or some low-fat milk, soy beverage, juice or a sports drink that digests quickly. Listen to your body. It's important to try different things and find what's right for you.

Questions

Athletes should be referred to a dietitian to accommodate the unique issues of individual athletes regarding health, nutrient needs, performance goals, physique characteristics (i.e., body size, shape, growth, and composition), practical challenges and food preferences.) Visit www.dietitians.ca/find to locate a dietitian near you.

Additional Resources:

[Nutrition and Athletic Performance](#)



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