

Getting your nutrition right is always important regardless of what sport you play. Most people focus on having a massive sugar overdose in the form of a red bull or a bar of chocolate. This will give you a huge insulin spike response which will ultimately result in a decrease in blood sugar. Avoid doing this at all costs!!

The reason for this is that your energy will be depleted in no time and low energy levels will NOT help you in a match (certainly not at the end) ... it is more important to build up your glucose stores a day or 2 prior to the game as opposed to relying on what you eat that morning and at lunch to fuel you!!

On the day, here is some information and ideas to help you get the best set up:

The goals of the pre-event meal are to:

- Top-up muscle and liver glycogen stores
- Top-up fluid levels
- Keep the gastrointestinal system feeling comfortable (prevent gastric upset)
- Boost confidence and give the player a psychological edge

The pre-game meal should be:

- High in carbohydrate to top up glycogen stores
- Low in fat so that it empties as quickly as possible from the stomach (food remaining in the stomach when exercise begins may cause discomfort)
- Moderate in protein
- Sufficient in fluid – sip on 500ml during the 2 hours prior to the game to ensure optimal hydration

Timing of the pre-game meal:

- The final large meal before a game should be eaten 3-4 hours before
- A smaller snack can be eaten 1-2 hours before the game

Pre-game meal ideas:

- Baked beans on toast
- Porridge with low fat milk
- Toast or bread with banana, honey or peanut butter
- Roll/sandwich with lean meat (tuna, chicken)
- Baked potato with low fat cheese, tuna, baked beans
- Pasta with low-fat sauce
- Pasta or rice salad
- Muffins/crumpets/pancakes with honey
- Fruit smoothies

Pre-game snacks:

- Bread or toast with jam
- Cereal bars
- Low fat yoghurt, drinking yoghurt
- Fresh or dried fruit
- Fruit bars
- Fruit bun, banana bread
- Sports bars, sports gels
- Meal replacement drinks
- Sports drinks

A well-balanced diet

The first nutritional requirement for every sportsman, whatever their level of ability, is a well-balanced diet that supplies the right amounts of energy and essential nutrients. It is important to enjoy a variety of foods as different foods provide our bodies with different nutrients.

Nutrition and Fuel for Sport

Fuel up on carbohydrate

Carbohydrate-rich foods play a vital role in sports performance, as carbohydrate is the most important fuel for exercising muscles. All carbohydrate, once digested is converted into blood glucose to be used as fuel, or stored as glycogen in the liver and muscles for later use.

The total amount of carbohydrate that your body can store as glycogen is minimal.

Regular exercise rapidly depletes these stores, so they need to be continually replenished from the carbohydrate in your diet, and obviously the more exercise you do the greater your dietary carbohydrate needs will be. Diets low in carbohydrate can lead to lack of energy, fatigue, loss of concentration (your brain relies on glucose to function properly), and delayed recovery. Low carbohydrate stores can also cause your body to start breaking down muscle protein for fuel, which may result in loss of lean muscle mass and therefore strength.

For this reason, carbohydrate-rich foods should form the basis of most of your meals and snacks. Carbohydrate-rich foods include cereals, bread, potatoes, grains (e.g. rice, barley), fruit, dairy products, starchy vegetables (e.g. corn, peas, butternut), sports-specific products (e.g. sports drinks, energy bars, gels) and sugar.

Tips for boosting carbohydrate intake (without the fat):

- Eat regular meals and snacks throughout the day and base them on carbohydrate-rich foods.
- Every plate of food should contain at least 50% carbohydrate-rich foods.
- Include starchy vegetables with your meals e.g. peas, corn, butternut.
- Eat at least 3 fruit portions daily.
- Include dairy products as snacks.
- Choose oven-baked chips instead of deep-fried chips.
- Eat a bread roll or sandwich instead of a pie.
- Compact sources of carbohydrate can help a player meet his requirements e.g. sports drinks, fruit juice, jam, syrup, honey, sugar, meal replacement drinks. However, these shouldn't be their main source of carbohydrate as they are low in vitamins, minerals and fibre.

Some examples of foods containing 30g of carbohydrate:

- 2 slices of bread
- 3 rice cakes
- 1 cup cereal or cooked porridge
- 2 weetbix
- 1 cup cooked rice/pasta/couscous
- 1-2 cereal bars (check labels)
- 1 cup baked beans
- 2 medium potatoes/sweet potato or 1 cup mashed
- 2 medium pieces of fruit
- 1 cup chopped or tinned fruit
- 2 tbsp raisins
- 250ml fruit juice
- 500ml low-fat or skim milk
- 175ml fruit yoghurt
- 10 jelly babies
- 500ml sports drink

Here's another interesting little fact for you... Did you know that your muscles consist of 60-70% water, and that a mere 1% drop in your hydration level can result in a loss of concentration and affects your performance.

Another simple little test you can use is the "pee" test. You simply want to make sure that your urine is as light as possible.

How to get hydrated

Don't make the mistake of drinking 1 -2L at a time and think that's going to hydrate you

Your body can only handle about 500ml an hour (this obviously varies from person to person and on your activity levels)

Drinking too much water will simply result in you just peeing it all out and you can actually dehydrate yourself even more.

If you find that you are still going to the toilet loads you might need to up your salt and electrolyte balance by adding some isotonic powder to some of your water

After the match, your energy levels will have been massively depleted and in need of quick refilling and it also time to help your muscles heal.

You should eat fruit, vegetables and protein in your post-match meal to recover and prevent any permanent damage. Drinking and eating carbohydrate rich foods as soon as possible after the game will help you recover more quickly. It's important to start refuelling as soon as you can after training or a game.

Opt for high carbohydrate, low fat snacks, such as:

- Sandwich with low fat cheese, ham, chicken, tuna, boiled egg, or jam and peanut butter
- Bananas
- Fruit muffins, or pancakes
- Bowl of cereal with low fat milk
- Cereal bars
- Fresh fruit, and a diet yoghurt
- Dried fruit
- Low fat cereal bar
- Fig rolls
- Sports drink

Obviously some of you will have different goals from needing to achieve fat loss, while others of you may need to actually build muscle and bulk. The meal plans you would need would have to be different but try to recognise that whilst carbohydrates will help you gain fat if eaten to excessively if it massively important for fuel in energy.

Protein gives you the muscle recovery and building that is needed especially after a game. And Minerals and vitamins are the keys to making the protein and carbohydrates work, so must be consumed regularly throughout the day ... YOU CANNOT over consume on these!!