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## Fueling Your Body For Exercise

*“What should I eat before and after my work out?”*

*“Will fasting before my work out give me better results?”*

*“How should I hydrate during and after my work out?”*

Sometimes the answer to these questions depend on the person working out and the activity. However, there are some common truths that apply to pre and post workout nutrition, whether you are an avid exerciser or just participate infrequently.

## What to Eat Before Exercise

Ideally, you should eat before you exercise, about 3-4 hours before. Think of your body as a car; you do not want to head out on a road trip with no gas! Food is your body's fuel and exercise takes a lot of energy. If you are like many people who like to exercise in the morning, setting your alarm for 3AM for a meal does not sound like a great idea. Although, it is not best to eat a full meal right before you exercise either; while your muscles are busy stretching and contracting, your stomach will simultaneously be digesting your meal. It takes energy to break down food, just as it does to exercise. With both energy drains occurring at the same time, it can affect your performance and possibly lead to some GI (gastrointestinal) discomfort.

Carbohydrates are the fuel for your muscles and the more intense your exercise, the more carbs you will need. Eating 1-4 hours before should fuel your body appropriately. The size of your meal (or snack) should depend on how close to your workout you are eating and how your body tolerates food during exercise. Exercising on an empty stomach can leave you short on energy for your workout and inhibit muscle growth. Some good ideas for pre-workout meals are as follows:

- A peanut butter and banana or PBJ sandwich
- Greek yogurt with berries
- Oatmeal with low-fat milk and fruit
- Apple and peanut or almond butter
- Handful of nuts and raisins (two parts raisins: one part nuts)

Each suggestion has a carbohydrate source for energy and some protein for muscle repair.

## What to Eat During Exercise

As mentioned earlier, you do not want to weigh down your stomach during a workout by filling it with food. It is best to focus on hydration during a workout, replenishing lost fluids with water.

During a long, intense workout, refueling may be necessary to ward off fatigue. An example of this type of exercise would be long distancing running or marathon training. In terms of this

kind of exercise a snack of easily digestible carbohydrates during a workout would be beneficial. Some examples are:

- Fruit
- Granola bar
- Handful of pretzels
- Sports drink

Notice that these snacks are simple carbohydrates that digest quickly. Snacks high in fiber, fat and protein take more time to digest and sit in your stomach longer.

## What to Eat After Exercise

You just used your energy stores to get you through that grueling workout, now you need to restock what you lost. The focus on your post workout meal should be carbs and protein. There isn't quite definitive evidence regarding the most beneficial time to eat after a workout, but it is generally thought of as a good idea to refuel within 1-2 hours of exercise. But again, keep your meal light on fats as that they will digest very slowly and can even slow protein digestion. Some examples of some post workout meals are:

- Post-workout recovery smoothie (or post-workout smoothie made with low-fat milk and fruit)
- Low-fat chocolate milk
- Turkey on a whole-grain wrap with veggies
- Low-fat yogurt with berries

These meals are mainly carb based, with plenty of protein to repair your muscles. The first two options also help rehydrate the body.

## Hydration

Replenishing lost fluids during exercise is key to avoiding dehydration and it starts before your workout! You will need adequate fluids before, during and after exercise.

The American College of Sports Medicine recommends:

- Drink roughly 2 to 3 cups of water during the two to three hours before your workout.
- Drink about 1/2 to 1 cup of water every 15 to 20 minutes during your workout. (May differ depending on your weight and the weather)
- Drink roughly 2 to 3 cups of water after your workout for every pound of weight you lose during the workout.

Source:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/exercise/art-20045506>

<https://www.eatright.org/fitness/exercise/exercise-nutrition/timing-your-pre-and-post-workout-nutrition/>

<https://health.clevelandclinic.org/what-to-eat-before-and-after-a-workout/>

