

What to Eat Before a Workout

By Andrea Holwegner BSc, RD

Regardless if you are headed out for a short swim, long endurance run or hitting the gym for a workout, you need to understand what to eat before training. Your pre-training nutrition is important to top up your energy and be the right quantity at the right time for the workout ahead.

How much water should we be drinking before a workout to ensure we are hydrated?

Drink fluids throughout your day and be sure to drink at least a half litre to a full litre (two to four cups) of fluid starting four hours before your workout. Showing up to a workout dehydrated might mean you will be fatigued and your heart rate unnecessarily elevated during your workout.

Should you eat protein or carbohydrate rich foods before a workout?

Choose carbohydrate rich foods: Carbohydrates should supply the main part of your pre-training meal. Carbohydrates found in foods such as grains, cereals, breads, fruits and veggies are quick to digest, provide energy for your working muscles and top up your blood sugar.

Have a small amount of protein if eating 2-4 hours before training: In order to sustain energy and fullness if you have two to four hours before a workout add a source of protein such as meat, poultry, seafood, nut butter, nuts, yogurt/milk, cottage cheese or eggs. Excessive amounts of protein is not ideal if you only have a short amount of time before your workout since protein is slow to digest and may feel heavy in your stomach or cause cramping or bloating.



What foods should you avoid before a workout?

Limit high-fat foods: Fat is very slow to digest and does not top up your muscle fuel. In your pre-training meal skip high-fat foods such as chocolate, chips, fries, greasy burgers, creamy or oily foods and large portions of nuts.

Watch high-fibre foods: While small amounts of fibre are generally well tolerated, be aware that fibre is slow to digest and may cause stomach upset during a workout without enough time to properly digest. (This is mostly common sense since I doubt eating bowl of bean based chili or a bran muffin would seem appealing before an intense workout!)





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How soon before a workout should I eat or drink something?

There is very large individual tolerance about what, when and how much to eat before a workout. Overall it is a bit of trial and error to see what works best for you. The less time you have, the smaller the amount of food generally tolerated. In general, if you have two or more hours before exercising eat a high carbohydrate meal that is low in fat and has a small amount of protein. If you have less than an hour before your workout stick with a small snack that is mostly carbohydrate.

What are some sample meal ideas if I have 2 or more hours before training?

- Smoothie with fruit, unsweetened juice and yogurt, milk or protein powder.
- Hot/cold cereal, milk/yogurt and fruit.
- Toast, banana, and peanut butter or nuts.
- Toast, eggs and juice.
- Sports bar and sports drink.
- Sandwich with turkey/roast beef and veggies.
- Pasta with tomato sauce and a small amount of meat, chicken or tofu.
- Vegetable soup with crackers and cheese.
- Cottage cheese and canned fruit with a low-fat muffin.
- Pasta salad with light vinaigrette, chicken breast and veggies.

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