

Sports Snacks: Food Options for Hungry Athletes | Active.com

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By Nancy Clark, MS RD CSSD ● For Active.com

"What should I eat before I exercise?" That's a key question—as well as what to eat during extended exercise—that athletes commonly ask me. While they know the words carbs, proteins and fats, they often don't know how to translate those words into food choices. The goal of this article is to offer specific food suggestions to fit a variety of sports situations. This is far from a complete list. Please be sure to experiment with new pre- and during exercise foods to learn which ones settle best in your gut, don't "talk back," and enhance your performance.

Pre-Event Carbo-Loading Dinner:

- Pasta with tomato sauce, meatballs, green beans, French bread, low fat/skim milk, frozen yogurt with strawberries
- Turkey with potato, stuffing, low fat gravy, winter squash, cranberry sauce, dinner rolls, apple crisp with reduced-fat ice cream

Pre-Game Breakfast

For example, 1 to 2 hours before a 9 a.m. cross-country meet or soccer game

- Wheaties (or other dry cereal) with low fat milk and banana
- Oatmeal with applesauce and brown sugar
- Cream of Wheat with raisins
- Bagel or English muffin with peanut butter
- Poached eggs with two slices of toast
- Yogurt and granola

Liquid "Meals"

If you have trouble digesting solid food

- Fruit smoothie (milk, yogurt or juice blended with frozen berries, banana chunks)
- Carnation Instant Breakfast
- Boost
- Ensure
- Low fat chocolate milk
- Vanilla pudding
- Pureed peaches

Brunch

4 hours before a 1 p.m. football or hockey game

- Heftier portions of any of the above breakfast options
- French toast with cinnamon sugar, berries, breakfast ham
- Pancakes with maple syrup, scrambled eggs, fruit cup
- Veggie omelet with non-greasy hash brown potatoes, toast
- Breakfast burrito (scrambled eggs, low fat cheese, salsa wrapped in a flour tortilla) plus fruit cup and orange juice

Four O'clock Pre-Game Dinner

Before a 7 p.m. basketball game

- Any of the carbo-loading dinners or brunch suggestions
- Cheese ravioli, tomato sauce, peas, fruit salad, sugar cookie

- Grilled chicken (small portion) with baked potato/low fat sour cream, steamed carrots, bread, blueberry cobbler, low fat milk (or milk alternatives: lactose-free milk, soy milk)
- Turkey sub with lettuce, tomato, low fat mayonnaise, baked potato chips, vanilla yogurt and oatmeal-raisin cookie
- Wonton soup, stir-fried chicken with veggies, steamed rice, lo mein noodles, pineapple chunks, fortune cookie

Grab 'n' Go Snack

100 to 300 non-perishable calories within the hour pre-exercise, stored in your desk or gym bag

- Nature Valley Granola Bar
- Quaker Chewy Bar
- Nutri-Grain Cereal Bar
- Fig Newtons
- Teddy Grahams
- Graham crackers
- Nilla Wafers
- Animal crackers
- Hard or soft pretzels
- Cinnamon raisin bagel
- Snack-box raisins
- Trail mix

Energy Bar Options to Fit Assorted Dietary Preferences

Good tasting, all-natural ingredients:

- Zing Bar
- Clif Nectar Bar
- Lara Bar
- Perfect 10 Bar
- Odwalla Ba
- KIND Bar
- NRG-Bar
- PowerBar Harvest

Gluten-free bars:

- Bora Bora Bars
- Lara Bars
- PURE Bar,
- First Endurance Bar
- Hammer Bar
- Wings of Nature Bar
- Zing Bar

Nut-free:

- Metaballs
- AllerEnergy Bar
(www.peanutfreeplanet.com)

Raw:

- Raw Revolution Bar
- PURE bar

Vegan:

- Pure Fit
- Lara Bar
- Hammer Bar
- Vega Whole Food Raw Energy Bar
- Clif Builder's Bar
- Perfect 10
- ReNew Life Organic Energy Bar

Yummy organic options by entrepreneurs who will appreciate your support:

- NRG-Bar (www.NRG-Bar.com; developed by an Ironman triathlete), Olympic bar (www.OlympicGranola.com; developed by a dad with eight kids), ZingBar (www.zingbar.com; developed by two dietitians who believe food should taste great)

Pre-Exercise "Quick Fixes"

These choices lack nutritional value but are easy to digest, provide the quick energy the body wants, and when eaten five minutes pre-exercise, are unlikely to create rebound hypoglycemia (also known as a "sugar crash").

- Pop-Tarts
- Nabisco Sugar Wafers
- Rice Krispie Treats,
- Toast with jelly
- Marshmallows
- Gum drops
- Jelly beans
- Licorice
- York Peppermint Patties
- Jell-O
- Sports drinks (Gatorade, PowerAde, etc.)
- Fruit juice
- Sweetened iced tea
- Defizzed Coke

- Homemade "energy drink"*

*To avoid red dye and questionable ingredients, *make your own energy drink*. Simply add 7 packets (teaspoons) of sugar to 8 ounces of coffee. You'll end up with 80 mg caffeine and 110 calories, similar to what's in a Red Bull but at a fraction of the price.

Pre-Exercise High Sodium Snacks

For athletes who sweat heavily; Consuming a salty food before exercise helps retain water in your body and delays becoming dehydrated

- Pretzels
- Salt bagel
- Baked chips
- Ramen noodles
- Chicken noodle soup
- Canned broth (chicken, beef or vegetable)
- Beef consomme (jellied)
- Boiled and salted red potatoes or potato chunks
- Ham & cheese sub with mustard
- V-8 Juice

Fuel During Exercise That Lasts for 2 to 4 Hours

Buy sports clothes with pockets, so you can carry these with you.

- Gummi bears
- Starburst Fruit Chews
- Jelly beans
- Licorice
- Butterscotch candies
- Peppermint Patties
- Tootsie Rolls
- Whoppers Malted Milk Balls
- Mini MilkyWay Bars
- GoGurt
- Gu
- Carb-Boom!
- Clif Shot
- Clif Shot Bloks
- Gu Chomps
- Honey Stinger
- Hammer Gel
- Jelly Belly Sports Beans
- Sharkies
- PowerBar Energy Blasts

Engineered options:

Fuel during exercise that lasts > 4 hours

For example, during a long bike ride, cross-country ski, or adventure race

Any of the above snacks that you might consume during 2 to 4 hours of exercise, plus more substantial fare:

- Peanut butter and jelly on bread, bagel or flour tortilla (wrapped "burrito style" to keep the jelly from oozing out)
- Gorp (raisins, peanuts, M&M mixture)
- Trail mix
- Ham and cheese in a pita pocket
- Beef jerky (for sodium)
- Noodle soup
- Sweetened condensed milk
- Chocolate bars
- Any food that tastes good, settles well and helps you survive the event. (We'll talk "good nutrition" at another time)

Nancy Clark, MS, RD, CSSD (Board Certified Specialist in Sports Dietetics) counsels both casual and competitive athletes in her practice at Healthworks, the premier fitness center in Chestnut Hill MA (617-383-6100). For fueling help, read her Sports Nutrition Guidebook and food guides for new runners, marathoners or soccer players. See www.nancyclarkrdr.com and also sportsnutritionworkshop.com.