

Eating Before Exercise

Athlete Scenario

The day of a football game, I feel nervous and often skip lunch. I know I need to eat something but pre-game jitters make it hard to keep food down. What types of meals and snacks will supply me with enough energy to perform well without upsetting my stomach.

Optimizing Pre-Exercise Nutrition

- Consume a carbohydrate-rich meal or snack before exercise to increase energy availability and speed post-exercise recovery. Based on individual tolerance, aim for a maximum of 1 g carbohydrate/kg body weight times the number of hours before exercise (e.g. maximum of 300 g for a 100 kg athlete if eating 3 hours pre-exercise).
- Include small amounts of protein in the pre-game meal. Adequate protein before exercise may help reduce post-exercise muscle soreness.
- Choose foods that are low in fat and fiber to ensure optimal tolerance.
- Prevent dehydration by consuming fluids in the hours leading up to exercise

Pre-exercise Foods & Fluids

1-4 Hours Before Exercise (*adjusted based on food preferences, exercise intensity, and duration of activity*)

- Peanut butter and honey on bread + fruit & yogurt smoothie
- Oatmeal with brown sugar and almonds + banana
- Low-fat cottage cheese or yogurt + granola + fruit
- Lean hamburger or chicken on bun + side salad + fruit & yogurt parfait
- Turkey and Swiss sandwich + fruit

30–60 Minutes Before Exercise

- Piece of fruit, crackers or jam sandwich
- Sports drink or water (aim for sports drink if last meal was over 3 hours prior)
- Sports gel, sports bar, sport beans or gummies
- Fruit puree pouch such as applesauce

Tips to Take With You

1. Practice makes perfect. Experiment with different foods/beverages during practice and lower level competitions to determine what works best for you. Liquid meal replacements and sports food may be better tolerated than whole foods.
2. Build meals that are carbohydrate-rich, moderate in protein, and low in fat and fiber to optimize digestion and energy availability.
3. Drink plenty of fluids and consume fluid-rich foods before exercise.

Contact SCAN