

Pre Game Meals

When to eat?

Timing is an important aspect of any pre-game meal. When to eat is almost as important as what you eat. This is because if you eat too early the sugars in that food are used up by the time you compete, therefore, you will feel like you have no fuel in your body. However, if you eat too close to game time you will be carrying food in your stomach while you play, as the stomach will start to slow its rate of digestion once exercise begins. This could make you feel sick to your stomach while you play.

So what is the best time to eat? Well most people believe the optimal timing is somewhere between two and three hours for solid food. Water and sports drinks can be consumed right up to the beginning of a game. Most trainers advocate drinking 8-16 oz about 20 minutes before the game.

A small snack about 1 hour before the game may also be advocated. This snack should be one that has a very quickly digested, or has a high glycemic index (see below).

What should be consumed?

2 - 3 hours before event:

Foods high in carbohydrates with a small amount of lean meat, or perhaps a small amount of dairy. Make sure the meal is low in fat (not over 10%) and ensure that all meals include a 16oz glass of water.

Examples:

Lean meat sandwich
Yogurt and a bagel
Pasta with a non cream sauce
Pancakes with syrup
Bagel with jelly and or a little peanut butter

1 hour before event:

Foods high in carbohydrates, no meat, low in fat and easily digestible.

Examples:

Yogurt
Bread
Dry Cereal (low fiber)
Sports Beverages
Crackers

What type of carbohydrates?

There are several different types of carbohydrates, for the purpose of this article we will separate them according to their glycemic index, this represents the rate of breakdown & release of sugar into the body. The slower a food digests the lower the glycemic effect. For the 2-3 hours prior meal, low glycemic foods will provide longer sustained amounts of energy. Whereas, for energy just prior to the event (1 hour before) foods with a high glycemic effect would be most appropriate.

Low Glycemic Index	Moderate Glycemic Index	High Glycemic Index
Rice	Rice Cakes	Glucose
Plums	Vanilla wafers	Carrots
Dairy Foods	Bagels	White Potatoes
Apples	Crackers	Honey
Dried Beans	Soda	Corn Cereal
Pastas	Cakes/Cookies	White Bread
Peaches	Wheat bread	Corn Chips
Fructose	Sugar	Sports Drinks
Nuts	Ice Cream	
	Sweet Potatoes	

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What types of food should be avoided?

Foods high in fiber or fat tend to slow down the absorption of food. Food that is high in protein may lead to premature dehydration. You should also avoid foods that may cause gas or foods that are unfamiliar to you. Also try to avoid caffeine, and foods that are really spicy.

Avoidance of "energy drinks" or energy supplements should also be strongly considered, these may contain high levels of caffeine, ephedrine and glucose all of which may have detrimental effects. Caffeine is a stimulant that can make athletes nervous or over stimulated while exercising this along with it acting as a diuretic make this drug something to avoid. Ephedrine has the effect of increasing our internal metabolism. When we increase metabolism several things can happen; first we increase the amount of fuel we use, therefore, the soccer player may run out of energy prematurely. Secondly, this increase in metabolism will increase our internal temperature making the athlete increasingly prone to heat illness.

Energy drinks also have extremely high quantities of glucose, whereas, glucose is a fuel for our body when taken in high concentration before athletics it can have a two-fold negative effect. The first of which is causing a rapid increase in the sugar level of the blood, this is followed by a rapid increase in insulin by the pancreas, once this happens the blood sugar level rapidly decreases causing lack of fuel for performance. Secondly, if carbohydrate drinks are more than 6% in concentration there is a slowing of the stomach and its ability to digest food and water. Therefore, the fluid will be left in the stomach longer which may give the athlete an uncomfortable feeling of a full stomach and more importantly will delay the fluid getting into the circulation of the body which may lead to dehydration.