

Pre-Game Meal

In general, the pre-exercise meal should focus on the provision of carbohydrates and fluids. Provision of a nutritionally balanced meal should not be a major concern at this time, especially if the athlete is well-nourished most of the time. There are several goals for the pre-exercise meal, including:

- Sufficient Energy - Making certain the athlete obtains sufficient energy to see him/her through much of the exercise/competition that will follow the meal. Inadequate energy may lead to light-headedness, blurred vision, early fatigue, and loss of competitive attitude.
- Prevent Feelings of Hunger - When the athlete feels hungry, this is a sign that blood sugar may be low. Low blood sugar could impair muscle function and is related to central nervous system fatigue.
- Drink Fluids - Provision of sufficient fluids to make certain the athlete begins exercise in a fully hydrated state is important for athletic performance and endurance.
- Eat Familiar Foods - Only consume foods you know make you feel good and don't cause any kind of GI distress. If you're competing in a country you've never been to, there is a big temptation to try unfamiliar local foods. Don't do that until *after* the competition.
- Avoid Large Amounts of Raw Fruits and Vegetables - Raw fruits and vegetables may be gas forming, and lead to GI distention and distress. In particular, foods in the cabbage family (cabbage, Brussel sprouts, mustard greens, kholrabi, etc.) appear to be a particular problem. Eating cooked vegetables or fruit juices do not appear to lead to problems.

TIMING: There should be adequate time for food to leave the stomach before the initiation of exercise. Because fats cause a delay in gastric emptying, fat in the pre-exercise meal should be kept as low as possible. Ideally, a high-carbohydrate meal should be finished 3.5-4.0 hours before exercise if the meal is large (lots of food); 2.0-3.0 hours before exercise if the meal is small. If fat constitutes more than 25% of total energy in the meal, the timing of the meal should be changed so that it moves further from the time of exercise. Light, carbohydrate snacks (crackers, etc.) may be consumed within 1 hour of exercise. Sports beverages may be consumed at any time before and during exercise.

Athletes with nervous stomachs may not tolerate food well before exercise or competition, yet they are still in need of energy to fuel their muscles. One solution is to make certain they consume very large amounts of carbohydrates the day before competition, followed by small snacks of carbohydrates and fluids on the day of competition. Some athletes may also tolerate liquid meal replacements well, but these should not be experimented with on a day of competition.

SAMPLE PRE-EXERCISE MEAL: (Calories)

- 🍝 2 Cups of Spaghetti (395 calories)
- 🍝 3/4 Cup of Meatless Spaghetti Sauce (203 calories)
- 🧀 2 Tbsp of Parmesan Cheese (46 calories)
- 🥗 3/4 Cup Tossed Salad (1 calorie)
- 🥗 1 Tbsp Low Fat Salad Dressing (67 calories)
- 🍞 2 Dinner Rolls (156 calories)
- 🍏 1 Cup Apple Juice (116 calories)
- 💧 2 Cups Water (0 calories)

Totals: 69% Carbs; 11% Protein; 20% Fat; 1,000 Cal
