



Eating for Top Performance: Nutrition Checklist

Here's the Deal

A strategic eating plan is crucial for getting the most out of your workouts, maximizing performance, and achieving success as an athlete. You can't expect your body to train and perform at a high level without providing it with the best possible fuel. Just like a car needs the right gas and oil to perform at its best, your body also needs the best fuels and nutrients.

But your diet or nutrition plan doesn't need to be perfect. It's all about the habits and routines you practice *most of the time*. It's OK to have occasional splurges or treats as long as most food choices, portion sizes, and fueling times are on target.

Why Try?

A well-designed nutrition plan can:

- Make you faster, stronger, and more powerful
- Improve your concentration and decision-making
- Give you more energy throughout the day
- Help you recover better and faster
- Reduce soreness and minimize injury risk
- Keep you from getting sick
- Allow you to excel at your sport!

Get in the Know

- You can improve performance with a strategic eating plan.
- It's important to eat well all day long—especially before, during, and after workouts.
- Stay hydrated all day, every day, including during workouts and competitions.

Eat consistently during the day

Eating frequently at similar meal times throughout the day helps keep your body stocked with the carbohydrates (energy for workouts), protein (needed to repair and build tissues), and fat (important to enhance endurance, healing, and recovery) you need. Whether you're eating at home, at school, or at a restaurant,

pre-scheduling your eating routine is important. Plan times for meals and snacks throughout your day so you are eating at least every 3–4 hours during the day.

Eat 5–6 times each day regardless of whether your goal is weight loss, weight gain, or weight maintenance. You can change up the amount of food you eat if your goal is weight loss or weight gain—but still eat 5–6 times a day.

TIMEOUT

What if I eat a big dinner each night and not much throughout the day?

This is considered a "Bottom Heavy" diet. "Bottom Heavy" diets refer to eating too little during the day and too much in the evening. Some athletes eat this way because of busy schedules, lack of hunger, or fear of eating too much before workouts.

- But it's important to take in fuel when your body needs it, which is all day long! Try to eat $\frac{2}{3}$ of your calories during the day and the other $\frac{1}{3}$ in the evening. Make sure you eat a good breakfast, lunch, and snacks between meals.

Develop a solid eating routine

You need to be aware of what you eat, especially before and after workouts. Athletes should eat a meal or snack 1–3 hours before every workout and a recovery meal or snack within 30 minutes of completing hard or long workouts.

Consistently eating a smart breakfast is also key to athletic success. Consider this: When you get up in the morning, your body hasn't been fueled for a long time, possibly as long as 10 hours! Eating as soon as possible after you wake up helps your body get the fuel it needs to jump-start your engine. This will help you think more clearly, keep your metabolism high, and help your body use energy more efficiently.

Bottom Line

- Eating quality foods with a well-designed nutrition plan can improve athletic performance.
- Your body needs to be fueled often and consistently. Have 5–6 meals and snacks per day, eating at least every 3–4 hours.
- Your body needs the best fuel most of the time to train at a high level.
- Eat a smart breakfast as soon as you wake up each day to jump-start your day.
- Stay hydrated!

Performance Nutrition Assessment

Nutrition Goals	Always	Most of the Time	Not Enough
DO I?			
Eat breakfast as soon as possible after I wake up			
Start drinking water or other fluids when I wake up to pre-hydrate for the day's workouts			
Plan meals and snacks so I eat every 3–4 hours during the day to properly fuel my body			
Balance my plate at meals with 1/3 protein (meat, fish, beans, cottage cheese, peanut butter) and 2/3 carbohydrates (grains and cereals, bread, pasta, rice, fruits, veggies)			
Eat 1-3 hours before practice to fuel my muscles ahead of time (mostly high-carbohydrate foods; no fried foods before workouts)			
Include "good fats" in my diet that may help with recovery, including nuts, seeds, soy nuts, peanut butter, olive oil, and oil-based dressings			
Maximize recovery nutrition after intense workouts by eating or drinking recovery fuel (fluids, carbs, & protein) within 30 minutes of completing exercise			
Eat at least 2 pieces or cups of fruit and 2 cups of vegetables a day to boost natural nutrients			
Eat or drink at least 3 high-calcium sources a day (a glass of milk, a cup of yogurt, a slice of cheese, a glass of calcium-fortified juice)			
Drink fluids all day long + at least 6 ounces for every 20 minutes during hard workouts			
Bring snacks with me during the day so I can stay fueled with energy			
Take a multivitamin daily			
Recognize that my nutritional needs are different than friends and family members who are not athletes			
Prioritize sleep (at least 7–8 hours a night) so my body has a chance to recover and repair on a consistent basis			
Consider my diet as a key part of my training regimen to help reach my athletic potential			

This handout was designed by Sports Dietitians Michelle Rockwell, MS, RD, CSSD and Susan Kundrat, MS, RD, CSSD to provide general education. For specific concerns, refer to your sports medicine team.