

NUTRITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR SWIM MEETS

This is an explanation of what a swimmer needs to eat before and during a swim meet. This is not a nutritional guide for diet over a long extended period of time. It is my attempt at trying to simplify a very complex subject without getting into the complexity of the processes involved. If further information is needed let me know.

The Importance of Nutrition Food is *fuel*. Without the proper food, your body performs poorly. As a swimming athlete, you must learn what your body needs for fuel and how it uses what you give it. What you feed your body will affect your energy level, your strength, and your performance. It will affect your ability to concentrate and to sleep. It will affect your moods.

Protein Protein-rich foods provide the building blocks of your body. They are very important to have in your daily diet. However, in the few days of competition they are not beneficial to the competing swimmer.

Fat Fat-rich foods not only contribute to weight problems but also impede performance. A fat-rich diet results in a "sludgy" oxygen transport system -- oxygen is not as effectively carried in the bloodstream. When your muscles run out of oxygen, they "fail." A high-fat diet will have you "failing" sooner than a carbohydrate-rich one.

Carbohydrates ***Complex Carbohydrates are the body's preferred fuel.*** There are two kinds of Carbohydrates, simple and complex. **Complex** Carbohydrates are the highest-energy foods you can eat. They tend to be relatively low in calories. Therefore, a high-carbohydrate diet will allow you to eat the greatest volume of food without fat weight, as well as provide your body with the greatest amount of its preferred fuel. Generally, they include vegetables, fruits, and grain products. **Simple** Carbohydrates have a simpler structure and are assimilated quickly -- for nutritional purposes, too quickly -- into the bloodstream.

Examples you want to eat

- Potatoes (steamed or baked)
- Breads (Whole grain are the best)
- Rice (Whole-grain is preferred over white)
- Cereals
- Pasta
- Beans
- Vegetables (Starchy preferred over leafy green)

Why stay away from Simple Carbohydrates? Simple Carbohydrates are better known as sugar. Because of the simple structure of sugar, it is immediately assimilated into your bloodstream and provides a burst of energy that you can feel. Your blood sugar level rises rapidly. You feel high on energy. But this is not a normal condition for your body, so it sets about trying to correct the situation. It increases the insulin level in your bloodstream in order to speed up the removal of the excess blood sugar. Your mechanism for removing sugar is now in overdrive and tends not to shut down at the appropriate time. The result: an energy slump following the energy high. You now experience low blood sugar. You'll feel hungry and tend to want to eat more sugar. But most importantly for swimmers, you will feel tired and physically depressed. You will swim poorly.

Examples of Food to Avoid

- cake, pie, cookies, ice cream
- candy, chocolate
- frozen yogurt
- soft drinks
- an excess of fresh fruit, canned fruit, fruit juices
(fruit contains both complex and simple carbohydrates. Too much will result in low blood sugar)
- pancake syrup, jams, jellies
- doughnuts

Getting Enough Water The truly forgotten nutrient is water. It transports nutrients, oxygen, and carbon dioxide to and from the body tissues. It also lubricates joints. And most important, it maintains normal body temperature. Swimmers should be drinking at least at least 8 cups a day. Do not rely on "feeling thirsty" as an indicator to drink. By the time a swimmer is thirsty, it is usually too late. He or she should have had water 30 minutes earlier. What about Electrolyte Replacement Drinks? Under normal conditions they are not necessary. Swimmers will easily replenish lost electrolytes though normal diet. But if it gets the swimmer to drink, then let them. At least their drinking and getting the water they need.

Eating on the Day of the Meet If a swimmer eats a big meal too close to race time, blood that should be supplying muscles with oxygen and nutrients will be busy absorbing nutrients from the intestine. Consequently, the muscles will suffer. A high, complex-carbohydrate, normal size meal should be eaten approximately 3 hours before competition.

Breakfast Ideas - should be satisfying but light

Cream-of-Wheat

Toast (light on the jam)

Cereal

Pancakes, Waffles (light on the syrup and butter)

Muffins

Fruit & fruit juices are good at breakfast time. However, avoid during the meet)

Vegetables

Oatmeal

Bananas are Great !

Snacks Snacks should be eaten throughout the day. The intake of fluids is especially important just after a race. Avoid fruit juices, (These are simple carbohydrates.)

Crackers

Apples, Bananas, Oranges

Pretzels

Bagels

Rolls

Vegetables

After the Meet Swimmers need to continue with a high carbohydrate meal after the race to replenish those glycogen stores for the next day.

Sandwiches (light meat)

Vegetables

Spaghetti, (Other pasta meals)

Thick crust Pizza

Fast Food Eating Nutritionally this can be a challenge. Fast foods have a high fat content and lack fruits and vegetables. Seek to stop at Breakfast or Pizza Restaurants.