

What to eat & drink *before exercise*

Early morning



If you exercise first thing in the morning, you do not have to eat beforehand, just make sure you get a nourishing meal afterward. Whenever this fits in best for you and your morning routine is usually the best plan.



If you feel low in energy, dizzy, or hungry during your morning exercise, you may want to eat a small carbohydrate snack 20 minutes prior to exercising - such as a banana, muesli bar, dried fruit, or honey on toast.

During the daytime or evening



A good sized nutritionally balanced meal 2-4 hours prior to exercise, including at least a fist full of carbohydrates (wholegrains or starchy vegetables) should stabilise energy.

Intense exercise



If you are doing intense exercise over 60 minutes (at any time of day) and you have not eaten for more than 4 hours before this challenging exercise, try a fast-digest carbohydrate snack within the 2 hour period before you exercise. This could be a banana, honey on wholegrain toast, muesli and yoghurt, creamed rice, or a muesli bar.



What to eat & drink during exercise

Under 60 minutes



Have water available whenever you are exercising, especially in the heat. Aim to drink enough to replace the sweat you lose. The more you sweat, the more water you need.

Over 60 minutes



If you are a heavy sweater, it's very hot, or you are an endurance exerciser - during intense prolonged exercise for more than 60 minutes, you may require replacement of electrolytes (sodium, potassium, magnesium, calcium). Do this by drinking an electrolyte-containing drink, adding a pinch of salt to your drink, or simply replenishing with food and water after your session.



Intense exercise e.g. soccer, rugby, tennis competitions and endurance running over 70 minutes can require carbohydrate fueling during activity. These need to be fast-digest carbohydrates to not upset your stomach. Aim to have between 30-60g of carbohydrates per hour during prolonged and intense exercise which can help sustain energy.



Fast carbs can be sports drinks, dried fruit, sports gels, white bread and jam sandwich, fruit pouches, or a muesli bar.



What to eat & drink *after* exercise



If you are otherwise well nourished and ate meals/ snacks before your exercise, you may not need any extra food after exercise. If you are not hungry, no need to rush to refuel, your body will use the nutrients from your next available meal.



If you are doing resistance training, eating protein within 2 hours after exercise is a beneficial timeframe, but not necessary. You will keep absorbing and using the protein you eat for repair and recovery for at least the next 24 hours, so simply getting into the habit of including protein-rich balanced meals is helpful.



If your exercise was intense, or endurance based, you may need a larger portion of carbohydrate to replenish your stores. Stores are depleted in around 60–90 minutes of extremely intense exercise such as team sports or running (not jogging). Refuel with a high-fibre, wholefood carbohydrate to look after your gut and your performance in the next session.



What to eat & drink *when you exercise*

Amount of food

It is normal for your appetite to increase when you are active (especially at the start of a new exercise regime). The amount of food needed is different for everybody, depending mostly on size and activity level.

Honour your appetite. Increasing wholegrain and starchy carbohydrate portions helps fuel good performance and energy for exercise sessions. Increasing lean proteins can help you repair and build muscle, supporting you to be stronger and fitter.

If you are concerned with weight gain, having a good appetite management strategy is key. Increasing portions of protein, fibrous foods, and vegetables will keep you fuller for longer. Try to have healthy snacks available so you aren't caught out.

Losing fat and gaining muscle

You can absolutely lose body fat and gain muscle at the same time. It is often a fine balance which requires more food than you may think.

- 2 or more resistance training sessions per week set you up for muscle growth
- Keep protein reasonably high e.g. 20-40g protein per meal
- Eat in a slight kcal deficit (not so low you impede on your lifting performance; you need good energy for muscle growth)

Hydration

Stay well hydrated by drinking around 2-3 litres of fluid per day. If you can, check that your urine is pale yellow to clear before you do any intense exercise.

Note: taking B vitamin supplements can often change the colour of your urine, so if you take these, the colour of your urine as a marker of your hydration status is not reliable.

