



Pre-Competition Nutrition

Pre-Competition Nutrition Keys

- Eat a small snack or meal 1–2 hours before training or competition, or a larger meal 3–4 hours beforehand
- Focus most on high carbohydrate foods and fluids—the two keys that will give you needed energy for working muscles and optimal hydration for exercise
- Steer clear of fried or greasy foods, which may upset your stomach and delay digestion of carbohydrate and protein
- Choose foods and fluids you like and are used to eating
- Plan ahead and make sure to get in enough energy to carry you through workouts and competitions
- Focus on energy-containing fluids as a good first step toward replenishing muscle energy without causing stomach upset

What you need to know

When you consistently fuel your body before you train and compete, you increase available energy for your muscles. Having more energy “on board” means you can go harder and longer without running out of fuel, which equals better performance. Taking a few extra minutes to eat and drink before workouts pays off in many ways—more energy, better recovery, better hydration status, and a lowered risk of injury.

Timing of pre-competition fuel

Timing of pre-workout and pre-competition meals and snacks is key to beating your competition. Plan the type and amount of food or liquids you consume based on the amount of time you have before exercise begins. The following chart offers nutritional recommendations based on your time schedule.

Time Prior to Competition	Recommended Food or Liquids
30 minutes–1 hour	Mostly liquids
1–2 hours	Small snack and liquids
2–3 hours	Small meal and liquids
3–4 hours	Moderate-size meal and liquids

Sample Pre-Competition Ideas

- 30 minutes to 1 hour pre-competition: Sports drink and water
- 1–2 hours pre-competition: Sports bar, orange slices, and sports drink/water
- 2–3 hours pre-competition: Turkey sandwich, banana, 100% juices, and sports drink/water
- 3–4 hours pre-competition: Pasta and meat sauce, steamed mixed veggies, fresh fruit bowl, whole grain rolls, 100% juices, and sports drink/water

PRE-COMPETITION MEAL IDEAS	
Breakfast Pre-Competition Meal	Dinner Pre-Competition Meal
<p>Larger portions of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Cold cereals ■ Hot cereals like oatmeal or grits ■ Cereal bars and granola bars ■ Pancakes and waffles ■ Toast, English muffins, and bagels ■ Low-fat muffins and tortillas ■ Fruit and fruit juice ■ Skim or low-fat milk and yogurt ■ Non-fat and low-fat soy milk and soy yogurt ■ Smoothies ■ Sports drinks ■ Energy bars and gels <p>Smaller portions of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Poached, boiled, or scrambled eggs ■ Lean ham, turkey, or chicken ■ Low-fat sausage or soy sausage ■ Low-fat bacon, turkey bacon, or soy bacon ■ Nuts or peanut butter 	<p>Larger portions of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Spaghetti and red sauce ■ Low-fat macaroni and cheese ■ Vegetable and chicken noodle soups ■ Potatoes, sweet potatoes, and rice ■ Breads, bagels, pitas, and tortillas ■ Fruits and fruit juices ■ Non-fat and low-fat milk and yogurt ■ Non-fat and low-fat soy milk and soy yogurt ■ Non-fat and low-fat ice milk, frozen yogurt, and pudding ■ Low-fat (e.g. mozzarella) cheese sticks ■ Frozen fruit bars ■ Smoothies ■ Sports drinks ■ Energy bars and gels <p>Smaller portions of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lean chicken, turkey, beef, pork, and fish ■ Eggs and veggie protein sources (tofu, veggie burgers, soy nuggets, nuts and peanut butter)

Making smart pre-competition fuel choices when EATING ON THE ROAD

Breakfast buffets

Choose more scrambled and boiled eggs; ham, veggie, and cheese omelets; pancakes, waffles, whole wheat muffins, bagels, and toast; cold cereal, oatmeal and grits; fresh, canned, and dried fruit and fruit juice; skim or low-fat milk; yogurt and cottage cheese; and extra water.

Sit-down restaurants

Choose more grilled, broiled, or baked meats like chicken breast, small sirloin steaks, fish, and turkey; turkey and grilled chicken sandwiches; mashed or baked potatoes (easy on the butter, sour cream, and bacon); pasta with red sauce, rice, and bread; fresh, canned, or dried fruit and fruit juices; skim or low-fat milk; and extra water.

Fast food restaurants

Choose grilled sandwiches easy on the mayo or sauce (grilled chicken, grilled single burgers); submarine sandwiches with lean meat; soft shell tacos and bean burritos; refried beans, chili, and rice; baked chips and mashed or baked potatoes; side salads or salads with grilled chicken; apple slices, fruit cups, and fruit juice; yogurt cups/parfaits and skim or low-fat milk; and extra water.

Pre-Competition Meal Ideas

Early Morning Competition:

If you compete early in the morning, select a quality snack before bed to “pre-load” your muscles with energy. Then, get up early enough to have a light breakfast with fluids and carbohydrates plus a little protein. You may need to stick with a smaller quantity of food to ensure it sits well in your stomach.

- **Snack before bed:** 1 big bowl of cereal/milk + a banana + 16 ounces water
- **Light breakfast** (1–2 hours before competition): 1 whole grain bagel/peanut butter + 1–2 cups apple juice + 16 ounces water **OR** liquid meal-replacement shake

Mid-Day Competition:

Eat a big breakfast (your main pre-competition meal) and a light snack or small lunch to “top off” muscle energy stores and get you ready to compete. It’s easy to eat high-quality carbohydrates, lean protein, and plenty of fluids with breakfast meals. Add a “booster snack” if you need it for extra energy.

- **Breakfast:** Scrambled eggs + 1–2 slices whole wheat toast with light margarine or butter and jelly or honey + 1 fresh melon or berry cup + 1–2 cups skim milk + 1–2 cups cranapple or orange juice
- **Light lunch:** Turkey sandwich + 1 single-serving package baked chips + 1 cereal bar + 1–2 cups grape or apple juice + 16 ounces water
- **Booster snack** (1 hour before the competition if needed): ½ of a sports bar + 1–2 cups sports drink/water

Evening Competition:

You should have plenty of time to power your muscles with energy throughout the day. Make sure you get up in time for a good breakfast and a light lunch or snack. Eat your pre-competition meal 3–4 hours before you play. Have a quick “booster” snack with you (granola bar, cereal bar, trail mix) in case you need a little extra fuel before you compete.

- **Breakfast:** Oatmeal with walnuts, raisins, and skim milk + 1 banana + 1–2 cups orange or apple juice + 16 ounces water
- **Light lunch:** Peanut butter and jelly sandwich + apple slices + pretzels + 16 ounces water
- **Pre-game meal** (3–4 hours before competition): Grilled chicken breast + pasta/sauce + fresh fruit cup + 1–2 cups apple juice or cranapple juice + 16 ounces water
- **Booster snack** (1 hour before the competition if needed): 1–2 cereal bars or granola bars + 1–2 cups sports drink or water

WARNING

Poor pre-exercise fuel options:

- fried foods
- high-fat meats
- creamy sauces, soups, or gravy
- creamy dressings (e.g. Ranch or mayonnaise)
- biscuits
- spicy foods
- entree salads
- cakes, pies, regular ice cream
- sugary cereals
- soda
- whole milk
- foods you have never tried before!

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.