

# SportsNutrition

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## The Athlete's Kitchen

Eating a performance-enhancing diet isn't easy, and for many athletes and active people, nutrition is their missing link. If that's your case, here are a few ABC's to get you started on the path to winning with good nutrition.

**Always** eat breakfast; it's the meal of champions! Within three hours of waking, fuel-up for a high-energy day.

**Breakfast** of champions? I vote for wholegrain cereal+ milk + fruit—an easy, wholesome, carb-protein combination.

**Carbohydrates** are essential to fuel-up and refuel your muscles. Do not “stay away from” pasta, potato, bread, bagels and other carbs wrongly deemed “fattening.” Excess fat-calories easily convert into body fat, but not carbs.

**Dehydration** needlessly slows you down, so plan to drink extra fluids before you exercise. The kidneys require about 45 to 90 minutes to process fluids, so allow time to tank up, eliminate the excess, and then drink again pre-workout.

**Energy bars** are more about convenience than necessity. Bananas, yogurt, fig cookies and granola bars offer convenient fuel at a fraction of the price. But if you prefer the convenience of bars, try Zing Bars ([www.ZingBars.com](http://www.ZingBars.com)). Yum!

**Food is fuel**—not the “fattening enemy” as some weight-conscious athletes believe. If you obsess about food and weight, find a local sports dietitian at [www.SCANDpg.org](http://www.SCANDpg.org).

**Gatorade** and other sports drinks are designed to be used by athletes *during extended exercise*, not as a lunch beverage.

**Hypoglycemia** (low blood sugar, as characterized by light-headedness, fatigue, and inability to concentrate) is preventable. To eliminate the afternoon energy lag/drop in blood sugar, enjoy a hearty snack between lunch and dinner.

**Iron-rich foods** include beef and dark meat chicken (thigh, leg). If you eat neither of those, choose iron-fortified breakfast cereals (Raisin Bran, Wheaties). Read the cereal label, and note *all natural* brands (Kashi, granola) offer little iron.

**Junk food** can fit into your sports diet in small amounts. That is, you don't have to have a “perfect diet” to have a good diet. Target a diet that is 90% quality foods and 10% “stuff”—sports drinks (refined sugar), birthday cake, chips.

**Keep track** of calories if you want to lose weight. You'll reduce body fat only if you create a calorie deficit. A popular website for tracking food intake is [www.fitday.com](http://www.fitday.com).

**Lifting weights** is the key to building muscles. For energy to lift weights, you need extra carbohydrates. To support muscular growth, eat adequate (but not excessive) protein. Each meal should be mostly carbs, with a side of protein.

**Muscles store carbs** as glycogen. Along with each one ounce of glycogen, muscles store about 3 ounces of water. Expect to gain 2 to 4 pounds of (water) weight when you carb-load.

## Start Your Engines: The ABC's of Sports Nutrition

Never eat an untried engineered sports food before an important competition. You may discover it settles poorly and hurts your performance. *Experiment during training!*

**Olive oil** is heart-healthy, reduces inflammation, and helps absorb vitamins A, D, E, and K. Although excess calories from oil (and other fats) are fattening, a little bit of olive oil on salads and with cooking adds taste and health benefits.

**Protein** is an important part of a sports diet, needed for recovery from hard workouts. But protein should be the *accompaniment* and carbs the foundation of the recovery meal. Make that a carb shake with a little protein (not a protein shake with a little carb).

**Quality nutrition** is found in natural foods. Be sure there are some apple cores and banana peels mixed in with the litter from your engineered foods and energy bar wrappers...

**Rest** is an important part of a training program; your muscles need time to heal. Plan one or two days with little or no exercise per week. Expect to feel just as hungry on days with no exercise; depleted muscles require extra food to refuel.

**Sweet cravings** are a sign you've gotten too hungry. Experiment with doubling your breakfast and lunch (and halving your dinner). You'll have more energy, better workouts—and far less desire for sweets.

**Thinner** does not equate to being a better athlete—if the cost of being thin is skimpy meals and poorly fueled muscles. Focus on being fit and healthy, not sleek, slim—but starving.

**Urine** that is dark colored and smelly indicates you need to drink more fluid. If you are well hydrated, you will eliminate pale-colored urine every 2 to 4 hours.

**Vegetarian athletes** who do not eat meat need to include some plant protein at each meal. Peanut butter on a bagel, hummus with pita, beans in chili are just a few suggestions.

**Weight** is more than a matter of will power; genetics plays a role. Forcing your body to be too thin is abusive.

**Xtra vitamins** are best found the “all natural” way: in dark colorful vegetables such as broccoli, spinach, peppers, tomatoes, and carrots, or in fresh fruits such as oranges, grapefruit, cantaloupe, strawberries, and kiwi. Chow down!

**Yes, even you** can optimally fuel your engines. The trick is: Don't get too hungry. When too hungry, you'll likely grab the handiest (but not the healthiest) food around.

**Zippy and zingy**—that's how you'll feel when you fuel with premium nutrition. Eat well and enjoy your energy!

Nancy Clark MS RD CSSD counsels casual exercisers and competitive athletes at Healthworks, the premier fitness center in Chestnut Hill, MA (617-383-6100). Her **NEW 2008** *Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook 4th Edition*, and her *Food Guide for Marathoners and Cyclist's Food Guide* are available via [www.nancyclarkrd.com](http://www.nancyclarkrd.com). See also [www.sportsnutritionworkshop.com](http://www.sportsnutritionworkshop.com) for online education.