

General nutrition for competitive swimmers

Nutritional needs change depending on whether you are in training or about to enter a competition

But if it is general tips you want on fine tuning your eating habits to perform better then here is some advice from the experts at the ASA.

Exercise Meals

If you're planning to go swimming or training later in the day try to eat an exercise-friendly meal two and three hours before you go. This means keeping your carbohydrate and protein levels high on roughly a 60:40 ratio and don't pig out on sluggish unsaturated fats.

Here are some good examples:

- Baked potatoes – fill them with beans, sweet corn or chilli, not too much cheese, and remember to eat the skin, it's the healthiest bit!
- Pasta meals or bakes – again go light on the cheese, throw in plenty of vegetables. Tuna is also a great energy source.
- Beans on toast – they may be the signature of a student's staple diet but low-sugar baked beans are actually really good for you. Bags of protein in the beans and wholemeal toast has your complex carbohydrates. And if beans aren't your thing, eggs will do a similar job.
- Chilli con carne – beans, lean mince, and brown rice all should set you up perfectly for exercise in a few hours. Fatty, greasy mince, white rice and salty tortilla chips will not.

Pre-training Snacks

- Unless you're trying to lose body fat don't train on an empty stomach, you'll be running on empty and your performance will be impaired. Eat a small meal or snack between one and two hours before you start your training.
- Great snacking foods are fruits (fresh is best but dried are still okay), energy foods (cereal bars, energy drinks, protein shakes), yogurt (low fat if possible) or whole grain foods (whole wheat cereal or wholemeal toast).

Snacking During the Day

- Elite athletes keep their blood sugar level as constant as possible by snacking regularly (and healthily) during the day.
- Only do this if you're training enough not to add body weight from the increased food/calorie intake.
- Target the same snacks you would as a pre-training boost – complex carbohydrates, fruits or protein shakes.

Refuelling

- If you're putting in the metres in the pool, your body will need a boost when you finish your training.
- Always try to refuel within 30 minutes of finishing and preferably within 15 minutes – your body immediately needs nutrients to repair muscles and replace energy.
- Make sure you're refuelling with the 'right' foods though – something low in fat but high in carbohydrates and protein.

(www.swimming.org)