

Nutrition for Swimmers Competing in All Day/Weekend Meets

Swimming events can last anything from 20 seconds to 15 minutes. Swimming is therefore a highly anaerobic sport, with aerobic metabolism becoming more important as the race distance increases.

Although each event may be brief, swim meets are usually held over one full day or the weekend, with swimmers typically competing in heats in the mornings and finals in the evening, or many event are heat declared winners. In most meets, swimmers may enter a large number of events and be required to swim a number of times in one day with 20 minutes to several hours between races.

So, the most important thing to consider is timing: what you can eat and drink and at what times.



What should I eat during the week leading up to the Meet?

- Ensure a high-carbohydrate eating plan.
- Include more rice and pasta. About 70% of the calories in your diet should come from carbohydrates leading up to the event. (At least 55%!)
- Include nutritious carbohydrate snacks in between meals. Cereal bars are excellent. They are high in carbohydrate and are easy to put in your packed lunch.
- Eating the right balance of increased carbohydrate and less fat is the key.

What should I eat for The Pre-Event Meal?

The pre-event meal is a 'mini-nutrition period' that occurs in the 2-3 hours before the start of a meet, usually the Breakfast. Most swimmers don't understand the exact role of the pre-event meal and eat as much carbohydrates as possible to top-up energy stores. It has little effect on increasing muscle glycogen levels.

Remember, to be able to perform well you usually need the stores of glycogen in your muscles to be full. It is the foods eaten during the week leading up to the meet that establishes the muscle glycogen levels. By meet day, glycogen levels are mostly "set" and there is little that you can do to increase them in the hours before competition.

Eat this meal about 2-3 hours before the warm-up. (This is the ideal but might be hard when warm-up is at 8:30 am!)

This meal should top-up your blood sugar levels after the night's rest. The meal should not have to be large, but should fill you up for the next few hours.

High-carbohydrate foods are the best options: e.g., bread, cereals, fruit, pasta, rice, though you probably won't want to eat pasta for breakfast!

- Ensure that the meal is low fat. Fat takes too long to digest.
- Useful drinks to have sports drink, juice, or simply water.
- Drink about 500-1000ml of water about 1 hour before the warm-up to 'top up' your hydration levels.
- Avoid the caffeine in cola drinks, coffee, chocolate, and tea - it dehydrates you.
- If you feel too nervous to eat, try a liquid meal such as a fruit smoothie.
- Practice with your pre-event meal in the days prior to the meet to fine tune what you will be eating. This will allow you to know whether it fills you up enough, and whether it tastes good!

What can I have for Breakfast?

Do's

- Eat cereals like oatmeal or oat bran.
- Select whole grain or high fiber cereals.
- Eat breads such as toast or bagels.
- Try milk, skimmed or low fat is best.
- Choose fruit, including fresh fruit and fruit juices.
- One egg with some toast.
- Choose fat free toppings like syrups and jams as an alternative to butter.



Don'ts

- Have a full fry-up including sausage, ham or bacon.
- Have too many eggs, concentrate more on have carbohydrates rather than protein.
- Have high sugar children's cereals. They will give you a quick fix
- Have fast food breakfast sandwiches. They contain too much fat which takes longer to digest. This will make you feel "stuffed" and lazy in the pool.
- Use too much margarine or butter.

And most importantly.....Don't.....

- Skip breakfast!!!!!! Swimming on an empty stomach makes you feel like you have no energy.

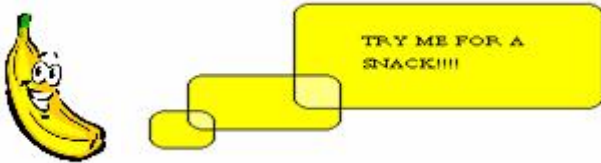


AVOID ME! I WON'T HELP YOUR PERFORMANCE!

What do I need to take after the Warm-Up?

These simple guidelines will guide you through recovery after the warm-up and prepare you for the heats.

- Replace fluids immediately after the warm-up
- Fill your drinks bottle with water (approximately 500ml) and drink all of it!
- Sports drinks have their benefits as they replace fluids and carbohydrate simultaneously, but make sure they are Isotonic (not higher than 8% concentration) as this will affect how quickly they are absorbed. Most of the leading commercial sports drinks are isotonic.
- If there is more than 1 hour between the warm-up and your first heat, try to eat a little. Something like a banana will stop you feeling hungry and give you more energy.
- The best approach is to eat a little and often during the day in between events.
- Eating too much at once can make you feel heavy and lethargic.



What should I be Drinking in between events?

Right before an event, it's best not to snack or drink. You do not want to start swimming with a stomach full of anything.

- Have a drink about 15 minutes prior to the event. This will allow enough time for it to be absorbed.
- In longer breaks of at least 90 minutes, have something to eat as well as some fluids.
- In shorter breaks, use a sports drink or water to replace fluids.
- The indoor pool environment is humid and dehydrating, so **DRINK, DRINK, DRINK!**
-

Keep drinking throughout the day to keep your blood and energy pumping. It is recommended to drink about 500ml every hour. However, due to the warm environment, this may be more.

- Do not wait until you are thirsty until you start drinking. Once you are thirsty, you are already dehydrated.
- **Important!** 2% dehydration leads to as much as a 10-20% decrease in performance!!

For short sprint events (25-100m)

- Consume a sports drink about 15-20 minutes before the first event. This provides glucose which enters the bloodstream quickly, giving you a fast boost of energy.

- Having high levels of muscle glycogen will not have a major effect on your sprint event, as long as your levels are not too low. This is because a single 50 or 100m race does not use massive amounts of carbohydrates.

For longer distance events (200-1500)

- Consuming 500-1000ml of water about 1 hour prior to the first event will be more beneficial.
- A sports drink can then be consumed which will give you a quick boost of energy.
- Your energy will come from muscle glycogen stores which were set by your previous meals.

What should I be eating in between events?

Foods that are high in complex carbohydrates are easier to digest and empty from the stomach faster, which is important, because not only do you want to swim on a relatively empty stomach, you also want the foods you eat to be efficiently converted to energy.

Cereals, pasta, bagels, baked potatoes and sandwiches are good carbohydrate sources that are easily digested and converted into glucose.

- If there is a longer break (a few hours), eat a high carbohydrate meal. A good idea is to pre-cook pasta and have it in your bag.
- Take your own foods and drinks with you (don't rely on the sweet machines!!).
- A cold pack and thermos helps to keep foods and drinks cold, which aids in absorption and is better on a humid poolside.
- Record your food and fluid intake to keep count of when you last ate and drank.

At the end there is a Workshop Sheet for you to plan for your next meet.

Snacks to have between events (1-2 hour breaks)

- Fruits or fruit salads are good and store easy in your bag.
- Bananas are the best fruit. They are high in carbohydrate.
- A small sandwich with a light filling. Try a banana sandwich.
- Fruit buns (e.g., hot cross buns) or raisin bread.
- Rice cakes (you can top them with honey, jam, or banana)
- Jam or honey sandwiches.
- Plain crackers with jam.
- Jelly.
- Low-fat yogurts.
- Energy Gels are a favourite with Ian Thorpe and Michael Phelps. They provide a fast source of blood glucose.

What can I eat when I have a long time in between events?

Do's

- Choose whole-grain breads.
- Choose lean meats like turkey and chicken.
- Have a baked potato with light toppings like baked beans or tuna.
- Eat pasta with a tomato 'stir-in' sauce and try to avoid fatty cream sauces.
- Eat good quality soups and stews.

Don'ts

- Eat fast food meals, they are high in fat and serve minimal nutritional quality for you next race. For example burgers.
- Eat fried foods like fish 'n' chips.
- Use too much dressing like mayonnaise or tomato ketchup.
- Eat fatty and salty luncheon meats too often.
- Skip the meal all together!

Recovery after Competition

- Have something to drink and eat immediately after your last swim. Water, a sports drink or a sports bar are best.
- Avoid the "fast food" chains on the way home - their high fat foods will delay recovery.
- The worst thing you can do is wait a couple of hours, and then have a little snack. This will not be sufficient, especially if you have an event the next day. A high carbohydrate meal with some protein is best.
- Protein will help repair muscles over-night and works best when consume with carbohydrates

Examples for a carbohydrate & protein meal:

- Spaghetti Bolognese
- Chilli Con Carne
- Chicken with Potatoes
- Jacket Potato with Tuna

What do I eat if I have events the next day?

Do's

- Eat pasta dishes. Spaghetti Bolognese is a good all round meal as it contains carbohydrates, proteins and fats.
- Eat rice dishes.
- Try making your own pizza. Start with a plain pizza base, add some tomato puree and a little cheese, and then experiment with your topping!
- A little fish is high in protein. Boiled fish is best with some vegetables.
- Have soups, with some bread to dip in.
- Have a baked potato with a low-fat topping.
- Have fresh fruit, yogurt, or jelly for dessert.

