What to Eat Before Your Morning Workout

5:00 a.m., alarm buzzing in your ear, “Beep, beep, beep”—or even your once favorite tune now blaring, making you quickly question how much you actually like it. You have your routine down to a tee; wake up, stumble to the closet, throw on something that seemingly appears clean, and hit the road to the gym. You are a 40 plus hour employee, possibly with a family, who’s only time to work out is before the sun decides to start its day. You are committed and you are doing everything right to live healthy and successful. So why is that when you workout you are not making progress? I mean your intentions are fully charged, but your energy 10 minutes into your workout is that of the overnight half plugged in phone battery. Is it stress? Is it lack of sleep? This could be, but what if it’s even simpler than that; what if it’s what you are or are not eating before your workout? Pre workout nutrition has a huge effect on your ability to push through your workout, and even if you are the 50% of people that eat something before your workout, you might not being eat the right thing.

Waking up is a hard thing to do—it’s stressful! Yes, I know you are exuberantly nodding your head saying to yourself, “Yea it is!” Well as sympathetic as I am for you having to get up, I’m talking on a biological level. Waking up requires the body to secrete a large amount of the hormone, cortisol, which is the stress hormone. Its main function is to help break down nutrients in the body. As we are sleeping, the mind and organs of the body are not. Throughout the night, our brain and central nervous system are depleting the liver of glycogen. Glycogen is the stored form of carbohydrates, which is what the brain and muscles in our body use for our primary fuel source. So when it’s time to get up, we are fasted, hence the name “break-fast” being your first meal of the day. For those reading who go into their workout bypassing breakfast, it’s important to understand that this can be damaging to muscle synthesis and no more effective in fat loss to those who do eat prior. This is because when working out, your body goes in to a state of nutrient-breakdown to help fuel the muscles activities, called catabolism. So yes, when you are working out, you are actually breaking down your muscles at the time. In order to help “flip the switch” and begin building muscle, you must provide nutrients to your body. This is called anabolism. Gym goers waking up and working out in the morning on an empty stomach now get a double dose of catabolic activity!

Just get to the point Justin! Are you telling me to just eat a bunch of carbohydrates then?!

**Crush the Carbs!**

Carbohydrates are needed to get the most out of your morning workout, yes. What type of carbohydrates you eat are equally as important though. Slamming a big bowl of oatmeal, while delicious, may end up on the floor by the end of an intense workout, and even if they didn’t, would do little to benefit your energy levels for the workout since they are slow digesting. Early morning gym goers need to focus on eating fast-absorbing, simple carbohydrates to allow for rapid digestion and nutrient uptake to fuel their intense workouts. This will optimize energy levels and provide the body energy-barring nutrients to breakdown, opposed to your muscle—don’t worry you will still burn the same amount of fat! How many carbohydrates you should eat will be a bit of trial and error, as you want to provide yourself enough to power through your workout, but not too much that will give an upset stomach. At the end of the article, I will provide various examples of excellent pre workout carbohydrate-dense meals and snacks.

**Plan and Protect with Protein**

Protecting your muscle with quality protein is crucial to ensure a positive nitrogen balance. Why is this important? As mentioned above, waking up is hard on the body! It’s a very catabolic process that promotes muscle breakdown, which is not ideal for individuals trying to achieve that lean muscular look. After 3 hours from a protein-rich meal, your body returns to the negative nitrogen balance. After sleeping for 5-8 hours, it’s imperative to flip that switch!

So what do I mean by quality protein? Isn’t protein, protein? For athletes, we want protein that is rich in the branched amino acid, Leucine. “The best protein to choose from are rich in leucine such as dairy products, beef, poultry, seafood, pork, peanuts, beans, lentils, and soybeans. Leucine tends to be the limiting factor in initiating muscle protein synthesis. Since some of these foods can sit heavy in your stomach and take time to digest, a simple whey or casein protein powder can be an excellent alternative! Additionally, supplementing with a branched chain amino acid can be an excellent and easy way to attain your leucine content. I recommend aiming for 2-3 grams prior to training.

**Forget the Fats**

Have you ever noticed that after eating a high fat meal, you are full for a longer period of time in comparison to a high carb meal? Think about it, what holds you over longer; a handful of almonds or a handful of chips? This is because fats take a much longer time to break down and be stored as energy than carbohydrates. Another reason why our body utilizes carbs as our preferred energy source, unless we are on a ketogenic diet. When fats are combined with our protein and carbohydrate sources, the meal as a whole becomes slower to digest and become utilized as energy; not what we want! So forget the fats for now and focus your pre workout meal around carbs and protein to maximize your energy output in the gym.

Powerhouse Breakfast Ideas:

1. Chocolate Banana Protein Shake
   1. 1 scoop chocolate whey
   2. 1 medium banana
   3. 1 cup skim milk
2. Cheesy Turkey Bacon & Egg White Breakfast Wrap
   1. 1 slice turkey bacon
   2. ½ cup eggwhites
   3. ¼ cup fat free or low fat shredded cheese
   4. Low fiber tortilla
3. Protein Pancakes
   1. 1 serving favorite complete pancake mix (no oil or eggs)
   2. 1 scoop whey protein
   3. ¼ cup eggwhites
   4. Reduced sugar syrup or pureed fruit
4. Toast topped with Greek Yogurt
   1. 2 slices white bread
   2. ½ cup low fat Greek yogurt or yogurt with protein powder mixed in
   3. Slices of your favorite fruit
5. Honey & Greek Yogurt Rollup
   1. 1tbsp honey
   2. ½ cup low fat Greek yogurt
   3. Low fiber tortilla

For more information on how much protein is necessary and how often you need to be consuming it, check out fellow Healthost Ambassador, Miriam Fayas-Whitfield, article by clicking [here](https://www.healthost.com/blog/view/396754/is-it-okay-to-say-no-to-whey).

For more information on ketogenic dieting, check out fellow Healthost Ambassador, Clea Sackfield, most recent article by clicking [here](https://www.healthost.com/blog/view/395467/to-carb-or-not-to-carb-that-is-the-question).