

# Eating Before Exercise

## Athlete Scenario

*The day of a football game, I often feel nervous and sometimes skip lunch, only to feel hungry later. Games are usually in the afternoon so I know I need to eat something beforehand. Playing both offense and defense, I rarely get a break. What foods can I eat and at what times to supply me with enough energy to perform well the entire game?*

## Goals of Nutrition Before Exercise

- Consume a carbohydrate-rich snack or meal before exercise to top off muscle stores. With pre-competition jitters, liquid meal replacements may be a better choice than whole foods.
- Include small amounts of protein in your pre-exercise meal(s). Protein helps build and repair muscle tissue. Adequate protein before exercise may help reduce post-exercise muscle soreness.
- Choose pre-exercise meal(s) that are low in fat and fiber to ensure optimal digestion.

## Pre-exercise Foods & Fluids

### 3–4 Hours Before Exercise

- Peanut butter & honey on toast + instant breakfast drink
- Fruit and yogurt smoothie + low-fat granola
- Oatmeal with brown sugar and almonds + skim milk + banana
- Low-fat cottage cheese + apple butter + crackers + fresh grapes
- *Lean* hamburger on bun with lettuce & tomato + side salad + yogurt-fruit parfait
- Turkey and Swiss sandwich + fruit + sports drink
- Low-fat tuna melt sandwich + fruit cup + fat-free yogurt

### 30–60 Minutes Before Exercise

- Sports drink or water
- Sports gel, sport beans or gummies, sports bar
- Piece of fruit or jam sandwich

Written by SCAN registered dietitians (RDs). The key to optimal meal planning for athletes is individualization. For personalized nutrition plans contact a SCAN sports dietitian or Board Certified Specialist in Sports Dietetics (CSSD) by accessing "Find a SCAN Dietitian" at [www.scandpg.org](http://www.scandpg.org) | 800.249.2875.

## Tips to Take With You

1. Experiment with foods and drinks in practice and lower level competitions to determine the best timing and your tolerance for pre-exercise foods.
2. Practice! Figuring out what works best for you will boost confidence in eating before exercise.
3. Fuel muscles early with easily digestible carbohydrate-rich foods and beverages for training or competition later in the day.

## Contact SCAN

Web site: [www.scandpg.org](http://www.scandpg.org)

Voice: 800.249.2875