

# ***Sports Nutrition for Young Athletes: Eating Before & Between Athletic Events***

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## Components of a Good Pre-Event Meal

- The meal should be consumed 2 to 4 hours before the event.
- The meal should be high in carbohydrate content with moderate protein and a very small amount of fat.
- Generally, foods should be somewhat bland. Spicy, gas-producing, and other irritating foods should be avoided.
- The meal should be low in dietary fiber.
- The meal should be moderate in quantity - less than 1,000 calories.
- Plenty of water and other fluids should be consumed. Small amounts of caffeine are acceptable if they are in beverages consumed.

Timing: Because virtually all food should be cleared from the gastrointestinal tract prior to exercise, timing of the meal becomes an important issue. Pre-event meals should be consumed from 2 to 4 hours before exercise. This allows ample time for a proper pre-event meal to be cleared. If the meal is consumed longer than 4 hours before the event, then the athlete may become hungry. Solid foods eaten less than 2 hours before exercise may not have time to be digested and absorbed. This can actually cause tolerance problems and the young athlete may feel bloated. A good alternative to solid foods when eating less than 2 hours before an event would be consuming liquid nutrition meals and supplements.

Composition of the meal: Carbohydrate foods clear the stomach and small intestines as do moderate protein foods. High fat foods empty the stomach more slowly. Thus, pre-event meals should consist primarily of high carbohydrate-type and moderate protein foods. Small amounts of fat are acceptable. Items such as wheat breads, cereals, light pasta, rice, fruits and fruit juices, egg whites, non-breaded chicken, turkey, and yogurt are all examples of foods that could be used in a pre-event meal. Foods such as steaks, french fries, hamburgers, hot dogs, nuts, and bacon should be minimized in meals eaten before competition.

## Pre-Event Foods:

|                     |                           |                  |
|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Toast and jelly     | Bread                     | Cream of wheat   |
| Macaroni            | Low fat yogurt            | Sherbet          |
| Skim milk           | Bagels                    | Turkey (no skin) |
| Low fiber cereals   | Thick-crust cheese pizza  | Rice             |
| Baked potato        | Canned fruit              | Puddings         |
| Applesauce          | Bananas                   | Grits            |
| Fruit juices        | English muffins           |                  |
| Egg whites (omelet) | Non-breaded/baked chicken |                  |

Dietary fiber: Normally, it would be a good practice to include foods with ample dietary fiber in one's diet. However, some types of dietary fiber can stimulate defecation and having to go to the bathroom during an athletic event is not advantageous. Foods high in fiber, such as beans, various types of bran, nuts, should be minimized during the hours or day prior to a major competition.

### Eating Between Events

Many athletes may have to perform several times during a day. Multiple matches in tennis and two or three soccer games in a day are not unusual. Guidelines for eating between these events should focus on recovery. Foods and liquid nutrition supplements should be consumed within 30 minutes of completing the first event or game. Often the time between events is less than 2 hours. In these cases a full meal cannot be consumed. Instead, a complete nutrition liquid drink containing both carbohydrate and protein can be consumed or a light solid food snack like lean lunch meat on bread should be well tolerated. Examples of carbohydrate-protein snack foods can be found in Table 4. Generally, in these situations the athlete would want to consume about 300 – 500 calories. The main focus is to keep the athlete hydrated, provide the muscles with needed energy for recovery, reduce feelings of hunger, yet still leave the gastrointestinal tract low on solids when competition begins.

### Between-Events Snack Foods:

|                        |                  |                                  |
|------------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|
| Oatmeal raisin cookies | Fruit Newtons    | Complete liquid nutrition drinks |
| Graham crackers        | Saltine crackers | lean lunch meat (chicken)        |
| Pretzels               | Low fat yogurt   | nutrition bars with protein      |
| Animal crackers        | Raisins          | peanut butter                    |
| Bread                  | Bananas          | Low fat puddings                 |
| Canned peaches         | Applesauce       | Sports drinks                    |
| Pop-tarts              | Vanilla wafers   |                                  |