

Eating to Train

By Julie Meek, Sports Dietitian (May 2017)

Training for gym is essential, yet many forget that eating well is an integral part of that training program.

The food you eat gives your body fuel to function. When we don't give our bodies the right type and amount of foods, it is like trying to run a car on unleaded petrol when it should have been given leaded petrol.

Eating the right type and amount of food improves our physical and mental function for everyday living as well as making it possible for elite athletes to perform at their very best.

Carbohydrate, which is stored in our liver and muscles as glycogen, is the fuel our bodies use for vigorous types of activity and vigorous exercise causes the glycogen stores in our muscles to run low.

That's why eating carbohydrate-rich foods like bread, pasta, and fruit, at each meal and – for athletes – particularly before and after training sessions, is critical to ensure a continuous supply of the right type of fuel.

It is also important to ensure that your protein needs are looked after and good sources of protein are lean meat, chicken and fish, legumes such as baked beans, dairy products, eggs and nuts. Iron, calcium and fluid are also important nutrients that will aid a good training schedule.

Don't forget to eat regularly and be vigilant about consuming some carbohydrate and protein within 15-30 minutes of finishing your training session, your muscles will thank you and your recovery will be vastly improved.

What about fluids?

One of the most important aspects of sports nutrition for training is your hydration strategy. What are you going to drink and how much?

Taking fluid on board during training is one of the most effective ways of enhancing your performance. Fluids are lost in sweat and how much you sweat will depend on your size, temperature on the day, clothing you are wearing, and how hard you are exercising. Sweat rates vary a lot but when sweat loss is not matched by fluid intake, dehydration will occur.

Staying hydrated is key to your performance but what are some good fluid tips when out training for the event?

- Begin your exercise session hydrated, drink well before you start
- Drink at regular intervals, around every 15 minutes and try to consume a couple of mouthfuls each time. You could set your watch timer at 15-minute intervals to remind yourself to drink.
- Water is the most practical and economical fluid. Cool water is better absorbed and is more refreshing and palatable.
- Fluid recovery is essential and you can check your fluid loss by monitoring your weight before and after training. The difference between the two is your fluid loss and you should aim to replace 125-150% of this loss over the next 2-6 hours. So, if you lost 1 kg in weight you will need to drink 1250-1500 ml to fully rehydrate.

