

*Dad, can I have a McDonalds after training please?! – **If this is you – think again!***

Is it competition week? Are you nearly at your next PB or qualifying time you've been chasing for so long? Have you already sinned on fish and chips this week? Perhaps it's time for a little help with your diet plan.

What you eat really makes a difference to how you perform in the pool the next day, week or competition. So here are a few healthy meals and snacks for athletes. To find more information go and visit www.swimming.org.

Exercise Meals

If you're planning to go swimming or training later in the day try to eat an exercise friendly meal two and three hours before you go. This means keeping your carbohydrate and protein levels high on roughly a 60:40 ratio and not pigging out on sluggish unsaturated fats. Here are some good examples:

- Baked potatoes – fill them with beans, sweet corn or chilli, not too much cheese, and remember to eat the skin, it's the healthiest bit!
- Pasta meals or bakes – again go light on the cheese, throw in plenty of vegetables. Tuna is also a great energy source.
- Beans on toast – Choose low-sugar baked beans which are actually really good for you. Bags of protein in the beans and wholemeal toast has your complex carbohydrates. And if beans aren't your thing, eggs will do a similar job.
- Chilli con carne – beans, lean mince (choose 5% from places such as ASDA, Aldi or Tesco), and brown rice all should set you up perfectly for exercise in a few hours. (Careful!: Fatty, greasy mince, white rice and salty tortilla chips will not.)

Pre-training Snacks

Don't train on an empty stomach, you'll be running on empty and you won't perform well. Eat a small meal or snack between one and two hours before you start your training.

Great snacking foods are:

- fruits (fresh is best but dried are still okay)
- energy foods (cereal bars, energy drinks, protein shakes or bars)
- yogurt (low fat if possible)
- whole grain foods (whole wheat cereal or wholemeal toast).

Snacking During the Day

Elite athletes keep their blood sugar level as constant as possible by snacking regularly (and healthily) during the day. Only do this if you're training enough not to add body weight from the increased food/calorie intake.

Use the same snacks you would as a pre-training boost – complex carbohydrates, fruits or protein shakes.

Recovery

If you're putting in the miles in the pool, your body will need a boost when you finish your training.

Always try to refuel within at least 30 minutes of finishing, **even better within 15 minutes** – your body immediately needs nutrients to repair muscles and replace energy. A sandwich is a good choice. To learn how to make the perfect recovery sandwich click [here](http://www.swimming.org) to check out the swimming.org website. Doesn't this look tasty!



Make sure you're refuelling with the 'right' foods though – something low in fat but high in carbohydrates and protein.

In all of this eating, don't forget to drink! Ensure to keep well hydrated before, during and after any training session and competition. It's no good taking that well prepared bottle of water or juice back home after your session!

When you train and work out nice and hard, your body loses both water and electrolytes by sweating, and using up all your energy. By drinking lots of water (tap – not pool!) you will be sure to replace what is needed in your body.

For those wishing to use sports drinks to provide additional support, please consider this in moderation as most sports drinks have between 4 and 5 heaped teaspoons of sugar per 250ml serving!