

# **NUTRITION - FACTS FICTION AND GUIDANCE FOR A DEVELOPING SWIMMER!**

This guide has been developed to assist swimmers and parents in the tricky subject of sports nutrition, with special relevance to competitive swimming. Topics covered include:

- What to eat day to day
- What to eat before a competition
- What to eat on the day of a competition
- Which drink for when!?!?!?!

The guide also covers some ideas on how to keep the cost of sports nutrition down, while dispelling many 'theories' on how to improve performance.

## What should I be eating day to day?

Due to the amount that swimmers train, they can get away with eating much more than most other athletes. Even at a young age, there is no problem with a swimmer having a healthy appetite!

The trick is to try and keep these foods as healthy as possible. Follow healthy eating guidelines for best results, although athletes do require extra!

Foods high in carbohydrate are a good way forward. Pasta, Rice and Potatoes are the most commonly mentioned, and are excellent for a swimmer.

## What should I be eating before a competition?

The answer to this is anything that makes you feel happy! Changing your diet a week before a competition will make little difference to how you perform. The trick is to keep your diet as healthy as possible at all times.

A good sized meal the night before a competition is essential, as it will give you lots of energy for the morning warm-up! That said, a good nights sleep is just as important! Sleepovers the night before a competition is a sure way to swim badly the next day!

## The day of the competition

Ok, so you wake up full of nerves with no appetite. Breakfast is the last thing on your mind. Anyone who has ever swum in an open meet has felt like this, but.....

It is ESSENTIAL you eat a good breakfast at least 1 hour before warm-up. Without breakfast, your body will have to work extra hard during the morning to find enough energy. This will mean you feel tired and grumpy in the afternoon.

Tired and grumpy = Slow swimming

Cereals, toast, fruit, yoghurt, porridge, weetabix..... The list of good breakfasts goes on and on. The most important thing is that you have a good portion and that it has plenty of carbohydrate in it. Breakfast will keep you fuelled for the day!

### At the competition

At the competition now, busy messing around with your mates rather than doing your dry land warm-up!?!?! If you still feel hungry, a small non sugary snack (cereal bars are perfect) at least half an hour before warm-up is fine. If it is less than 30mins to warm-up, have a sip on a carbohydrate drink and get on with your warm-up!

Carbohydrate drinks are fluids that are full of energy. Obvious examples of these are lucozade energy and powerade. These drinks should NOT be used to replace lost fluids! They are designed to replace energy, and not fluid lost from your body during exercise.

During competition, it is essential to stay fuelled up! Let's take a typical open meet, and go through what you should eat stage by stage:

6.00am – Wake up, have breakfast.

6.30am – In the car, have a cereal bar and banana just to top up, wash down with some squash.

7.00am – Warm up, keep drinking water/squash in small sips.

8.00am - Warm up is over, But you are in the first event. NO food now, just a sip of carbohydrate drink.

8.30am – Race 1 down! Big PB and feeling hungry, another cereal bar/banana and some more squash. Next race is in about an hour, so maybe even a bit of toast.

9.00am – Last sip of carbohydrate drink before the event

9.30am – Race 2 down! Next race 11am

10.00am – Time to open up the pasta, just a few forks. Not too much! Wash it down with some carbohydrate drink (a few sips) and some water. A banana maybe?

10.30am – Final sip of carbohydrate drink.

11.00am - Another PB and now a long break until afternoon warm up at 1pm

11.01am – Open up that pasta, a good portion this time, but don't bloat yourself! Too much will mean the body will need to work hard to digest it. Maybe a banana and then some jelly for desert? Keep going on the water!

1pm – Afternoon warm up

2pm – Afternoon warm up is over, time for a quick banana to keep the body topped up. Come carbohydrate drink as well for some quick energy.

3pm – Oh look, another PB, and still feeling full of energy as we have eaten plenty in small amounts. This time of day is the time to have a few sweets (NOT CHOCOLATE!!!!). These will give you some extra sugar and help you stay awake.

4pm – Final race of the day and a massive PB.

4.01pm – In the finals.....best have a banana and some more pasta now, as warm up is at 5pm.

5pm – Warm up

6pm – Warm-up is finished, just a few sips of Carbohydrate drink now, then its time to win gold.

6.15pm – Gold medal in the bag. It's time to get some food down you as soon as possible. Have a big meal as soon as possible (NOT Macdonalds!). Then home for a good sleep and another day winning gold medals.

The trick to competitions is to eat small amounts regularly. A big breakfast followed by lots of snacking on high carbohydrate foods is great. Some sugary sweets for a boost of energy is also good.

A common error that swimmers make is to eat a big meal in the lunch break. This makes you feel bloated and heavy, and your body has to use all of its recently acquired energy to digest the big meal. You should never eat less than 30mins before swimming, and if possible, stretch that to 60mins.

Sweets are great, but please bare this in mind. Sugar gives you a boost of energy, followed by a time of feeling tired. Every time you eat sweets, the sugar rush will only last so long before you feel even more tired. Some sweets are good, but have too many and you may just see your swims getting slower and slower.

Chocolate is the biggest no no of the lot I am afraid. Chocolate has a chemical in it that makes you feel sleepy (hot chocolate going to bed...). The short term gains of chocolate are very much outweighed by the tiredness you will feel after. One sure way to swim badly is to have a bar of chocolate 30mins before a race.

To sum up, small and regular snacks which are high in carbohydrate, coupled with sips of carbohydrate drink and plenty of water are the way forward. A good breakfast and a large high carbohydrate dinner after are very important. Avoid chocolate (sorry ☹) and keep sweets for only when your feeling tired.

### **Drinks!!!!**

Keeping yourself full up on fluids is essential to top performance, both in training and in competition.

Now a little fact for you:

*“When you feel thirsty, you are already dehydrated by 2%. This makes your blood thicker, so your heart has to work harder to pump it around your body. If you feel thirsty, your heart rate is already 10 beats per minute higher than it should be!!”*

Find that a bit scary?!?! Think how it will affect your performance in the swimming pool!

### **Drinking during the day**

Keeping your body hydrated throughout the day is vital. Regularly drinking at school/at home will really help keep you awake and alert. Don't wait until you feel thirsty. It might even make you get better test results!

Small sips are the best way to take in fluids. Your body can only absorb so much fluid at once. Drinking in big gulps only makes you go to the toilet more!

If you do not drink enough during the day, the chances of you suffering headaches or cramp during your training session in the evening is much, much higher.

## Drinking at training

During a training session you lose a lot of fluid through sweating. This needs to be replaced consistently throughout the session. Again, small sips are the trick. Gulping will only cause you to need a toilet stop in the middle of a big set! You should have at least 1 litre of fluid with you during the session (1 litre per hour is best). If your bottle needs refilling, don't be scared to ask your coach!

## The Big Question: What to Drink?

### At Home/School?

Anything. All fluid will help keep you hydrated. Though it's worth remembering, any drink other than water will have additional effects on your body. Too much coke will make you hyper, then very sleepy, and will rot your teeth. Fillings will stop you swimming! Red Bull is even worse for this.

### At Training?

Water or weak squash are best. Nothing Fizzy!!! And try to avoid Lucozade, which has a different use!

### After training?

Keep sipping on water/squash, but also add either a milkshake or some Lucozade to help your body to recover. Milk is full of protein that helps your muscles to recover, while Lucozade is full of sugar to replenish what you have lost during the session.

### At Competition?

A combination of water/weak squad and either fruit juice or Lucozade. Water/Weak squash should be consumed regularly throughout the day. Regular small sips are perfect. Then after a race, a couple of sips of lucozade/fruit juice will give your body a boost of energy to help it recover for the next event.

Here is a guide of common drinks.



Weak squash is great during training/competition. If it's too strong you are likely to get a stitch. Add a pinch of salt to avoid cramp. Strong squash can be used as an alternative to Lucozade.



Should not be consumed anywhere near training/competition. Not very good for athletes. Rots your teeth!



Fizzy Lucozade. Avoid during training/competition. Ok after training to restore energy. Not as good as Lucozade sport.



Excellent for after training, but is a definite no no during training. Small sips during competition are fine after races.



Expensive version of water. Weak squash with a pinch of salt does the same job.



Much the same as Lucozade sport. Should not be seen on poolside during training.



Fruit Juice is great for after training. Helps replenish the sugars lost during the session. Can also be mixed with water instead of squash for during training.



Mr Reliable. Good at anytime, anywhere.



Milk is excellent after training. It's perfect for helping rebuild those tired muscles.