

# Precompetition Meals

## What's the purpose of the precompetition meal?

The precompetition meal serves four purposes:

- to keep you from feeling hungry before and during the event
- to maintain the levels of sugar in your blood for your muscles to use during training and competition
- to provide proper electrolytes and nutrients
- to supply high quality protein that is easy to digest to help prevent muscle breakdown

Many athletes often skip meals before they train or workout, especially if the workout is in the early morning. Skipping meals or not eating before an early morning workout lowers the stored energy in your body and can impair your performance. This is particularly true if your workout involves endurance training that lasts for 30 minutes or longer.

## When should I eat my precompetition meal?

Your stomach should not be full during your event. In general, it takes 1 to 4 hours for your stomach to digest a meal and empty it into your intestines. If you are nervous, that process may take even longer. Food that remains in your stomach during an event may cause nausea and vomiting.

Every athlete is different in terms of when to eat the precompetition meal. A simple guideline is to eat your meal 1 to 3 hours before the start of your competition, so your stomach will be almost empty during the event. Experiment with the timing of your precompetition meal to see what works for you.

## What is a good precompetition meal?

Your pre-event meal should include 2 main calorie sources:

- Foods that are high in carbohydrates, such as breads, pasta, fruits, or vegetables. Your stomach and intestines digest these foods quickly. Carbohydrates also help build up stored energy in your body for use later during your event.
- Foods that are a good source of protein.

To avoid stomach upset or nausea, the closer you are to the time of your event the less you should eat. You can have a liquid meal closer to your event than a solid meal because your stomach digests liquids faster. This is especially useful if you are nervous and tense.

If you compete at all-day events such as track meets, swimming meets, or tournaments, you may be tempted by whatever is available at concession stands. Consider the amount of time you have between your events, bring healthy foods, and plan accordingly.

Suggested pre-event menus include the following:

### **1 hour or less before competition**

- fruit or vegetable juice such as orange, tomato, or V-8, and/or
- fresh fruit such as apples, watermelon, peaches, grapes, or oranges and/or
- up to 1 and a half cups of a sports drink and/or
- protein that is easy to digest, such as whey protein in liquid form (like a protein shake)

### **2 to 3 hours before competition**

- fresh fruit, fruit or vegetable juices, and/or
- bread; bagels; English muffins with limited amounts of butter, margarine, or cream cheese; or low-fat yogurt; and/or
- up to 4 cups of a sports drink
- protein that is easy to digest, such as whey protein in liquid form (like a protein shake)

### **3 to 4 hours before competition**

- fresh fruit, fruit or vegetable juices, and
- bread; bagels; baked potatoes; cereal with low-fat milk; low-fat yogurt; sandwiches with a small amount of peanut butter, lean meat, or low-fat cheese; and/or
- up to 7 and one-half cups of a sports drink
- lean protein foods (avoid fatty or fried foods)

## **Does eating sugary foods before exercise improve performance?**

Athletes sometimes consume simple carbohydrates such as honey, candy, or soft drinks right before exercise in hopes of getting quick energy. Unfortunately, eating sugary foods won't provide it. Most of the energy for exercise comes from foods eaten several hours or even days before the start of the race or event.

If you are an endurance athlete, recent evidence suggests that eating some sugary foods (like energy bars, some types of candy bars, or sports drinks) 35 to 40 minutes before an event may benefit you by providing energy (glucose) to your exercising muscles when your other energy stores have dropped to low levels. However, some athletes are sensitive to having their blood sugar levels go up and down quickly. Eating sugary foods

right before an event could harm their performance. Also, there is overwhelming evidence that athletes also benefit from eating highly digestible protein, such as whey protein, before and during exercise. The whey protein helps athletes recover faster and decreases muscle breakdown. Also, drinks containing easily digestible protein as well as carbohydrates have been shown to be more effective than carbohydrate-only drinks. Try different things and find out what works best for you. Never try new precompetition foods and strategies without trying them in practice first.

## **Does caffeine improve performance?**

Yes, caffeine can help improve athletic performance. Like other drugs, caffeine can provide some benefits but too much can lead to problems. There are many studies of caffeine's effect on athletic performance going back to the 1800s. It has been shown to improve coordination, endurance, and speed, even in moderate doses of 3 to 5 milligrams per kilogram of body weight. The effect is dose related: the higher the dose, the larger the effect. However, higher doses also cause more side effects. Some people are very sensitive and have side effects from caffeine that include nausea, muscle tremors, and headaches.

A common myth is that caffeine can cause an athlete to produce more urine and lose more water. Studies have shown caffeine does not have much of an effect on fluid status or electrolyte balances.

Caffeine binds to receptors in the brain, heart, skeletal muscle, and fat cells. It works mainly by stimulating your central nervous system. It increases heart rate, decreases feelings of pain and fatigue, and increases the burning of fat.

## **What should I avoid for my precompetition meal?**

The hot dogs, doughnuts, nachos, potato chips, and candy bars found at most concession stands are very high in fat and not digested quickly. If you eat these foods as pre-event meals, they will likely be in your stomach much of the morning or afternoon. Avoid or limit eating these foods for your pre-event meal.

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**Some examples of meals and snacks are listed below:**

## BREAKFAST

### Meal #1

1 hardboiled egg  
1 slice whole grain toast  
1 tsp butter  
1 tbsp honey or jam  
1 fruit 1  
8 oz glass water

### Meal #2

1 cup low fat yogurt  
1 slice whole grain bread  
1 tbsp honey or jam  
1 cup fruit 1  
8 oz glass water

### Meal #3

$\frac{3}{4}$  Cup Oatmeal cooked in water  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup cottage cheese  
1 fruit 1  
8 oz glass water



## LUNCH

### Meal #1

Turkey Sandwich  
4 oz turkey breast sliced  
2 slices whole wheat bread  
2 tsp mayonnaise  
1/2 sliced tomato shredded lettuce  
1 cup milk  
1 8 oz glass water

### Meal #2

1 cup canned split pea soup  
5 wheat thin crackers  
2 Cups Tossed Green Salad  
2 Cups shredded Iceberg lettuce  
1/2 Cup diced tomato  
1/2 Cup diced cucumber  
2 Tbsp Oil/Vinegar Dressing  
1 8 oz glass water

### Meal #3

Melon Salad

1 cup melon chunks  
1/2 cup Strawberries  
1/2 cup grapes  
1 Tbsp Sunflower Seeds  
1 Cup Low Fat Cottage Cheese  
1 8 oz glass water

## DINNER

### **Meal #1**

Cajun Snapper  
1/2 cup rice  
1 cup broccoli (steamed)  
1 tbsp olive oil & lemon marinade  
1 8 oz glass water

### **Meal #2**

Garlic Ginger Chicken  
1 cup pasta  
1 green salad tossed  
1 tbsp oil/vinegar dressing  
1 8 oz glass water

### **Meal #3**

Grilled Tuna  
1 Peach  
1 8 oz glass water

## SNACKS

### **Snack #1**

1 scoop whey protein powder  
with 8 oz water  
1/2 toasted bagel with Jam

### **Snack #2**

1 hardboiled egg  
1 cup strawberries

### **Snack #3**

4 oz artificial crab meat  
1 apple