

Food for Optimal Performance

Here's my two cents on how, what and when to eat to improve your athletic performance.

Our bodies burn fats and carbohydrates to produce energy. The production of energy from proteins is a slow process that mostly occurs in malnutrition states and with extreme endurance competitions. Excess protein intake puts a strain on your kidneys and liver and causes your body to urinate more, leading to dehydration. With this in mind it seems logical that eating fats and carbo's is the best way to prepare your body for a big event.

If your event is less than an hour or two, what you eat is not as big a factor. Those of you playing in tournaments or doing extended runs and walks may benefit by watching what you eat. With any activity you're helped by drinking water before and throughout the competition. There is no benefit to using sports drinks with activity lasting under two hours. There may be limited benefit for sports drinks with extended and endurance activities.

Many of you have heard the term "carbo-loading." This approach to pre-performance eating suggests that for the days and hours leading up to the "big game" you should load up on carbohydrates like grains, breads, rice, potatoes, fruit, vegetables, etc. This high intake will raise your carbo stores and give you more energy for the competition. In addition to carbo-loading, you'll want to do some limited "fat loading." Fat from seeds, nuts, avocados, oils, and other vegetarian sources are best.

Avoid eating bananas, celery, grapes, peaches and shrimp as these foods may causing allergic-type reactions to occur under the stress of activity. Finish eating solid foods by four hours prior to vigorous exercise or competition. Avoid roughage before competition as it will make you feel sluggish due to its slow digestion.

You get all the nutrients and electrolytes you'll need from the food you eat. Keep an eye on how you're feeling at all times and adjust your food and fluid intake accordingly. No matter what your duration of activity remember to drink lots of water and eat a well balanced diet for optimal endurance and performance.

Yours in health,

Dr. Rick

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