

What to Eat Before and After a Workout

What you put into your body before and after a workout can have major influence on how you perform and how you feel. It is important to fuel your muscles beforehand and then shift focus to recovery once the exercise is over. Which foods are best for fitness activities and which should you avoid? We have the answers for you.



Before A Workout

A pre-exercise meal should include foods that are high in carbohydrates and are easy to digest. Foods such as breads, cereals, pasta, rice, fruits and vegetables are great as a quick energy source for your muscles.

It is best to allow a meal to fully digest before you begin your workout. Exercising on a full stomach may cause stomach upset, nausea or cramping. It generally takes 1-4 hours to fully digest a meal, depending on the person and how much they have eaten.

Suggested foods before exercise:

1 hour or less before exercise:

- Fresh fruit such as apples, watermelon, peaches, grapes, or oranges
- Water (200-300 mL)

2-3 hours before exercise:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Whole grains (brown rice, quinoa, millet, etc)
- Water (400-600 mL)

3-4 hours before exercise:

- Fresh fruit and vegetables
- Whole grains (brown rice, quinoa, millet, etc)
- Lean protein (chicken, fish, beans, eggs, etc)
- Water (400-600 mL)

Foods to avoid before exercise:

Foods with a lot of fat or fiber can be very difficult and slow to digest. These types of foods will also pull blood into the stomach to help in digestion, which can cause cramping. Avoid these foods:

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- Red meats
- Donuts
- Fries
- Potato chips
- Candy bars

After A Workout

The number one priority after a workout is to replace any fluids that have been lost during exercise. In general, it is recommended to weigh yourself before and after exercise and drink 2 ½ cups of water for every pound that has been lost.

A combination of protein and carbohydrates within 30 minutes of finishing a workout is recommended for optimal recovery. The ideal carbohydrate to protein ratio is 4:1 (meaning you should consume 4 grams of carbohydrate for every 1 gram of protein). Consider these foods after you finish your next workout:

- Fruit smoothie
- Protein shake
- Breakfast cereal with milk
- Hard-boiled egg with slice of toast
- Low-fat cheese and whole grain crackers
- ½ cup of cottage cheese and a peanut butter sandwich
- A handful of nuts

Foods to avoid after exercise:

There's nothing worse than eating the wrong foods after a workout and undoing all that time and energy you put in to get fit. Avoid these foods after exercise to stay on track with your health goals:

- High-sugar energy bars, fruit drinks and soda
- Low calorie veggies (i.e. carrots and celery...you need something more substantial!)
- French fries, oily pizza, or fast food subs and burgers
- Salty snacks

Sources: <http://sportsmedicine.about.com/od/sportsnutrition/a/EatForExercise.htm>,
<http://sportsmedicine.about.com/cs/nutrition/a/aa081403.htm> <http://www.fitday.com/fitness-articles/nutrition/healthy-eating/4-post-workout-foods-to-avoid.html>