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Healthy Meals and Snacks for Athletes



If you're a competitive swimmer you'll already be aware of the importance your diet plays on your performance in the pool. Here are a few healthy meals and snacks for athletes.

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 – they may be the signature of a student, but like our low-sugar baked beans are actually really good for you. Bags of protein in the beans and the bread is just as your complex carbohydrates. And if beans aren't your thing, eggs will do a similar job.
- Chilli con carne – beans, lean mince, and brown rice will set you up perfectly for exercise in a few hours. Fatty, greasy mince, white rice and soft cheese will not.

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[NOTE: Some sentiments contained within "What We're Reading" articles may not strictly conform with PROJECT: PFC's nutritional outlook. We read articles containing opposing information all the time and derive our nutritional philosophies from the latest science, the opinions of experts worldwide and our anecdotal experiences in the field. We keep an open mind and a strong affinity for fact-based evidence to help make the world of nutrition "Simple Again" for you.]

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- 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 – they may be the signature of a student's staple diet but low-sugar baked beans 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, and brown rice all should set you up perfectly for exercise in a few hours. Fatty, greasy mince, white rice and salty tortilla chips will not.

Pre-training Snacks

Unless you're trying to lose body fat don't train on an empty stomach, you'll be running on empty and your performance will be impaired. 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)
- 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.

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

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

Always try to refuel within 30 minutes of finishing and preferably within 15 minutes – your body immediately needs nutrients to repair muscles and replace energy.

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

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