



THE PRE-EVENT MEAL

The pre-competition meal provides a final opportunity to top up the muscle and liver fuel stores. A high-carbohydrate, low fat meal is the best choice. You might like to adapt one of your everyday meals to suit your event timetable, or you may have some special pre-game eating rituals. Larger meals should be consumed 2-4 hours prior to your event whilst lighter snacks can be consumed 1-2 hours beforehand. For events later in the day you might like to combine these strategies. We are all different when it comes to what feels comfortable and gives us confidence. Whatever you choose, make sure that you try it during training or practice matches to fine tune your plan - never do something new on the day of an important event.

Examples of suitable pre-event meals:

- Cereal + milk or yoghurt
- Toast, muffins or crumpets with jam or honey
- Canned spaghetti on toast
- Pancakes with syrup or honey
- Fresh or canned fruit
- Pasta with vegetarian or other low-fat sauces
- Rice dishes with low-fat sauces, or creamed rice
- Sandwiches or rolls with low-fat fillings
- Fruit smoothie
- Liquid meal supplement

How important it is for you to eat before an event depends on how well you are already prepared. Your liver fuel (glycogen) stores deplete overnight, so it makes sense to top up in the morning. Also, if a busy exercise schedule has prevented you from fuelling up your muscles well, the last meal can make a difference. However, a nervous tummy or an early start can make it uncomfortable to eat much. One alternative is to try a liquid meal to provide an action packed boost – for example, a fruit smoothie or a commercial supplement such as Sustagen Sport or Exceed sports meal. Other 'light' snacks include toast, rice cakes or sports bars. If your pre-event is less than perfect, make it up by taking extra care with refuelling during the event.

What about having a sugar fix?

Eating carbohydrate before exercise causes a rise in your blood insulin levels. This will reduce the rate of fat oxidation during exercise, making your muscles more reliant on carbohydrate. A few people suffer an exaggerated response and can become "hypo" during the exercise. However, for most people, the metabolic effects are small and short-lived; within 15-30 minutes of exercise all differences are minimised. Most studies show that carbohydrate intake before exercise either improves exercise or has a neutral effect. Only one study has reported a performance problem and this is the study that has received the publicity! If you are one of the few people that

experience's a bad response, then you should avoid carbohydrate before exercising, or ensure that you eat well in advance of the session so that insulin levels return to normal before you start. Of course, consuming carbohydrate during the exercise session will help maintain blood glucose levels.