

“Eating Habits for Athletes”

By: Mind to Muscle Sports Conditioning Centre

While some athletes place little importance on eating and their diet, pre and post-exercise meals play a necessary role in sports. The foods we choose to eat provide our bodies with important nutrients. These nutrients can be likened to fuel needed to operate a car; both need fuel and once the fuel runs out, you simply, “run out of gas”.

Proper pre-exercise meals will help to prevent low blood sugar, which may cause fatigue, dizziness and slow reactions both mentally and physically. Be sure to include foods that you enjoy and are easily digested in order to prevent stomach-aches or cramps.

Pre-exercise meals should be composed mainly of carbohydrates with moderate portions of protein and low in fat. If you prefer to eat a meal that is higher in protein, fat and calories, try to eat 2 hours earlier as they take longer to digest. A few suggestions for pre-exercise meals might include: a lean meat sandwich (without butter) and a banana and skim milk or soup with crackers and skim milk or hot cereal with applesauce or peanut butter on whole wheat bread with fruit and skim milk.

A common myth is that eating a candy bar an hour prior to exercise will supply energy. However, you want your body to use stored glycogen for exercise energy not the sugar from the candy bar. Remember to always eat familiar foods before exercise. If you wish to try new foods or combinations, do this before a practice or training session but not before a game.

Post-exercise meals are likely more important than pre-exercise meals. The food you eat after your event will determine the amount of energy you will have for the next practice or game. Foods such as, pasta with red sauce or steamed vegetables or garden salad with low fat dressing and fresh fruit are all good choices to refuel muscle glycogen. It is a good idea to bring healthy snacks to your practice or game. Just keep dried fruit, granola or energy bars, pretzels, or low fat whole grain crackers in your hockey bag to eat immediately after exercise rather than waiting until home.

For pre-game nervousness, you may replace a meal with a liquid nutritional supplement such as, Carnation Instant Breakfast, Boost, Ensure or Enercal. These will provide enough energy to avoid playing hungry and ease a feeling of being sick.