

NUTRITION FOR SOCCER PLAYERS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PRE-COMPETITION MEALS

WHY THE PRE-COMPETITION MEAL?

The purpose of the pre-competition meal is to avoid hunger before and during the event. This meal helps you stay physically comfortable and mentally alert. If the meal is eaten at least six hours before the event and follows an overnight fast, the meal can raise blood glucose levels and liver glycogen.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE PRE-COMPETITION MEAL

Your pre-competition meal should include several high-carbohydrate foods. These foods take the least time to pass through your stomach. Most foods from the Vegetable Group, Fruit Group, and Grain Group are excellent sources of carbohydrate.

High-protein foods, like low fat dairy foods and lean meats (tuna; baked ham; broiled, skinless chicken), may be safely included in your pre-competition meal. However, eat them in moderate portions.

BEFORE COMPETITION AVOID

- Higher-fat foods like hamburger, sausage, lunch meats, and peanut butter.
- Fried foods like doughnuts, chips, french fries, and fried fish or chicken.
- Fats like mayonnaise and salad dressings.

Because these foods are higher in fat, they take the longest time to pass through the stomach. Foods that remain in the stomach during competition may cause indigestion, nausea, and even vomiting. If you include any of these foods in your pre-competition meal, eat them in small amounts.

HIGH-CARBOHYDRATE FOODS

Be sure to include several high-carbohydrate foods in your pre-competition meal. The following foods are good sources of carbohydrate.

- Milk Group
 - low fat chocolate milk, ice milk, low fat frozen yogurt, skim milk, low fat milk, low fat yogurt
- Meat Group
 - black-eyed peas, pinto beans, navy beans, refried beans
- Vegetable Group
 - corn potatoes, peas (baked, boiled, or mashed), sweet potatoes
- Fruit Group
 - apples, oranges, bananas, pears, grapes, raisins
- Grain Group
 - bagel, pasta, cornflakes, pita bread, English muffin, raisin bran, hard roll, rice, oatmeal, whole wheat bread

SOME SAMPLE PRE-COMPETITION MEALS

These sample pre-competition meals include plenty of high-carbohydrate foods. Use these menus and the handout What You Need to Know about Food when planning your own pre-competition meals.

- **Sample Meal #1**
 - Orange juice, cornflakes with a sliced banana, whole wheat toast with jelly, and skim milk
- **Sample Meal #2**
 - Vegetable soup, chicken sandwich on wheat bread, applesauce, and low fat strawberry yogurt
- **Sample Meal #3**
 - Julienne salad (lettuce and other fresh vegetables with thin strips of cheese and turkey), a hard roll, frozen yogurt, and grape juice

WHEN SHOULD YOU EAT THE PRE-COMPETITION MEAL?

The pre-competition meal should be eaten at least two to a maximum of four hours before the event. **No foods, not even high-carbohydrate foods, should be eaten in the hour before competition.**

The only thing you should have right before competition is plenty of cool fluid so you don't overheat.

FOOD POWER

You have an important practice or a big game today. So what should you eat?

4 HOURS BEFORE PRACTICE OR THE GAME:

Choose a high-carbohydrate meal from the foods above. Aim for one that supplies 8 calories for each pound you weigh.

$$\frac{\text{your weight}}{\text{your weight}} \times 8 = \frac{\text{calories for the meal}}{\text{calories for the meal}}$$

Circle the foods you choose in red. Be sure to include something from each food group. And aim for around 120-250 grams of carbohydrate (CHO) (depending on your weight).

2 HOURS BEFORE PRACTICE OR THE GAME:

If you are hungry, choose a light snack. That way, you will avoid indigestion and nausea. Pick a snack that supplies about 2 Calories per pound you weigh.

$$\frac{\text{your weight}}{\text{your weight}} \times 2 = \frac{\text{calories for the snack}}{\text{calories for the snack}}$$

LESS THAN AN TWO HOURS BEFORE PRACTICE OR THE GAME:

Don't eat anything. But make sure to drink 1 1/2 cups (12 oz.) of water or a sports drink 10-15 minutes before exercise.

DURING PRACTICE OR THE GAME

Drink 1/2 cup of cool water or a sports drink every 10-15 minutes during practice or competition. More in hot conditions. This hydration is needed even in cool/cold temps.

The Pre-competition Meal

(courtesy of Cornell Cooperative Extension, Association of Oswego County)

What you eat before competition can influence your performance. Five things need to be considered when choosing your pre-competition meal: (1) Timing, (2) Amount (3) Composition of meal, (4) Physical and emotional stress, and (5) Individual variation.

Time and Amount - Schedule the pre-composition meal 2 to 5 hours prior to the event. This will allow time for food to move out of the stomach. You may want to try eating a fairly light meal 2-3 hours before competition or a large meal 4-5 hours prior to competition. Experiment to find the meal pattern that works best for you.

Composition of Meal - The best pre-competition meal is mainly carbohydrate foods with some protein and a small amount of fat. Foods containing carbohydrates empty from the stomach more quickly than foods containing fat and protein.

Physical and Emotional Stress - During periods of physical and emotional stress blood flow to the stomach and small intestine is reduced, slowing the digestive process. Consequently, food eaten before competition may take longer to digest and cause a heavy feeling in the stomach.

Individual Variation - The optimal time, size, and composition of the pre-competition meal will vary considerably from one athlete to another. You need to find a meal pattern that works best for you. However, there are some general recommendations that you follow

Sample Pre-competition Meals

1. Breakfast	2. Lunch	3. Dinner																														
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">Fruit juice</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: right;">½ cup</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ready - to - eat cereal</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1 oz</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Skim Milk</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1 cup</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Wheat bread</td> <td style="text-align: right;">2 slices</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Margarine</td> <td style="text-align: right;">2 tsp.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Apple</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1 medium</td> </tr> </table>	Fruit juice	½ cup	Ready - to - eat cereal	1 oz	Skim Milk	1 cup	Wheat bread	2 slices	Margarine	2 tsp.	Apple	1 medium	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">Turkey sandwich or small hamburger one (no mayonnaise)</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: right;">1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fruit juice</td> <td style="text-align: right;">½ cup</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Skim milk</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1 cup</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cookies</td> <td style="text-align: right;">2 medium</td> </tr> </table>	Turkey sandwich or small hamburger one (no mayonnaise)	1	Fruit juice	½ cup	Skim milk	1 cup	Cookies	2 medium	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">Spaghetti w/ tomato sauce</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: right;">1 cup</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Skim milk</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1 cup</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Green salad w/ 2tsp. oil/vinegar dressing</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>French bread</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1 roll</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fruit salad</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1 cup</td> </tr> </table>	Spaghetti w/ tomato sauce	1 cup	Skim milk	1 cup	Green salad w/ 2tsp. oil/vinegar dressing		French bread	1 roll	Fruit salad	1 cup
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NOTE: After competition and as soon as appetite permits, eat a meal rich in complex carbohydrates to help replenish glycogen stores.