

Sports Nutrition

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BREAKFAST IS FOR CHAMPIONS

Every breakfast skipper has a reason for missing this important meal of the day. *"I don't have time"*, *"I'm not hungry in the morning"* and *"I'm on a diet"* are three common excuses. Unfortunately, athletes who skip breakfast generally train less effectively, suffer needless fatigue and may perform sub-optimally. They also tend to have trouble concentrating, and work or study less efficiently in the late morning. If you are a breakfast skipper who routinely misses out on this energizing meal, try this experiment: Eat breakfast for three consecutive days and observe the obvious energy advantages. You'll quickly discover that breakfast is indeed the meal of champions!

To help incorporate breakfast into your morning routine, here are some answers to the excuses:

- *"I don't have time"*: You really do have time to do what you want to do. If you can make time to train, you can also make time to invest in your training program by appropriately fueling your muscles. You'll discover that you:
 1. Can think and work better if you've fed yourself within two hours after a morning workout.
 2. Have much more energy during an afternoon workout if you've fueled yourself with a substantial breakfast. If you don't eat breakfast at home, then simply eat breakfast on the run -- a pocket breakfast (bagful of nuts, raisins and granola) at the bus stop, a cheese sandwich on the way to school or work, or a yogurt and muffin at morning break. You don't have to eat breakfast immediately upon rising, but rather within three hours of waking.
- *"I'm not hungry in the morning"*: If you rearrange your current meal patterns, you probably *will* be hungry. Most often, athletes who lack a morning appetite ate their breakfast at bedtime. Evening snacks can certainly curb one's morning appetite...and also contribute to weight gain (if you over-eat), dietary deficiencies (if you replace a wholesome breakfast with nutritionally poor snacks) and muscular fatigue (if you eat inadequate carbohydrates). Chips, cookies, ice cream and other popular evening snacks are high fat foods. Fats don't fuel your muscles. You will better invest in top performance with a carbohydrate-rich sports-breakfast of cereal, pancakes or bagels.
- *"I'm on a diet"*: You'll lose weight better by eating a substantial breakfast, rather than a large dinner. Research indicates that you're more likely to burn off calories that you eat during the daytime, in comparison to eating the same calories in the evening. A wholesome, carbohydrate-rich breakfast not only fuels your muscles but also prevents you from getting too hungry, at which point you simply "don't care" about what you eat and are likely to over-eat "junk food", blow your diet, and cheat yourself of the vitamins, minerals and carbs that you need for top performance. Remember: You're going to eat the calories eventually; you might as well eat them in the morning to prevent yourself from getting too hungry, then overeating. Breakfast invests in losing weight -- not gaining fat.

What's best to eat? Any breakfast is better than no breakfast, but some choices are better than others for your sports diet. Most athletes eat more than enough protein at lunch and dinner. Hence, breakfast is a convenient time to boost carbohydrate intake. High carb choices include cold or hot cereal, pancakes, waffles, french toast, muffins, english muffins, bagels, toast, banana bread, fruit, juice, flavored yogurt, or whatever high-carb foods might be readily available for a non-traditional breakfast -- pasta, baked potato, crackers, thick-crust pizza.

One quick and easy "breakfast of champions" is ready-to-eat cereals with lowfat milk, banana and orange juice. This simple meal can provide important nutrients that support your athletic program:

- * **Carbohydrates** -- the best source of muscle fuel. Carbohydrates should provide at least 60% of the calories in your diet. A breakfast with cereal, lowfat milk, banana and juice provides about 90% carbohydrates -- excellent!
- * **Iron** -- a mineral important for carrying oxygen from the lungs to your working muscles. An iron-rich diet reduces your risk of becoming anemic and experiencing needless fatigue during exercise. By drinking a glass of orange juice along with *iron-enriched* cereals, you'll absorb more iron. Note: the "all natural" cereals such as granola, shredded wheat or Grapenuts have no additives -- hence no iron added to them. Combine them with enriched brands to enhance your iron intake.
- * **Calcium** -- from the milk or yogurt that you eat along with cereal. Calcium is important for strong bones, as well as muscular contractions. Try to choose *lowfat* milk / yogurt; it is a heart-healthier source of calcium than whole milk products.
- * **Potassium** -- a nutrient that you lose in sweat. Bananas, orange juice and whole grain cereals are potassium-rich foods.
- * **Fiber**-- if constipation is a problem, fiber promotes regular bowel movements and thereby reduces the risk of unwanted pit stops during exercise. Select raisin bran, bran flakes, All-bran, corn bran or any bran cereals.

In summary, breakfast can be a high carbohydrate energy booster for athletes who need to fuel and/or refuel their muscles. Without this morning meal, you're likely to run on fumes, perform less effectively and reduce your intake of nutrients that contribute to top performance. Try these carbohydrate-rich meals for a high energy day:

1. Cereal, banana, orange juice, lowfat milk.
2. Muffins or bagels with jam, yogurt, dried fruit (raisins, apricots, dates, figs, etc.).
3. Pancakes, french toast or waffles with syrup, juice, lowfat milk.
4. Pita with 1-2 slices lowfat cheese, fruit and/or juice.