



Pre- exercise Fuelling

As a coach you want to ensure that your athletes arrive ready to train or compete. The food they eat and drink before training or competing can help ensure they are ready by providing a chance to:

- Fuel and hydrate the body and brain for the exercise session ahead.
- Avoid unwelcome and distracting hunger pangs during the session or unwanted stomach discomfort or visits to the toilet.

We have provided some responses to common questions that your athletes might ask you about eating and drinking before exercise.

Athlete: How long before exercise should I be eating?

The short answer is “it depends” but generally most people can tolerate their last main meal 2-4 hours before exercise without any unwanted stomach upset. Athletes may also want to have a small snack to top up energy stores in the hour or so before exercise.

Athlete: What about drinking?

It is a good idea to sip on fluid in the few hours leading up to exercise rather than gulping a large volume down just before you start. This allows your body to use the fluid effectively and avoid the need to go to the toilet or have any stomach discomfort soon after beginning exercise.

Athlete: What should I be eating before exercise?

Everyone is different in what they like to eat (and what sits comfortably in their stomach) before exercise but in general, your pre-exercise meal or snack should be:

- Rich in carbohydrate to prime your fuel stores
- Low in fibre, especially if you have issues with your gut or feel very nervous
- Easy to digest – avoid foods overly high in fat or protein as these are slower to digest
- Familiar – practise your options in training and do not try anything new on event day!

There is no one “best” pre-exercise meal or snack option and it will depend on individual athlete goals and requirements, but here are a few ideas to share with your athletes:

- Small bowl of cereal with chopped fruit, milk and yoghurt
- Crumpets with sliced banana and drizzle of honey
- Small bowl of pasta with tomato-based sauce
- Fruit smoothie
- Raisin toast with jam
- Tub of creamed rice with canned fruit

It is also important for athletes to consider their carbohydrate intake leading into training/competition at least 1-2 days before, that can impact on overall quality of performance in training or competition – it’s not always just about the pre – event meal!

Athlete: What is the best fluid to drink before exercise?

The ideal fluid before exercise depends on your goals and predicted fluid losses. If fluid is mainly being used to hydrate for the session and minimise dehydration, then water or electrolyte drinks are good options. If you need a source of fuel then sports drinks may help as they contain carbohydrate, electrolytes and fluid to aid hydration and fuel the body at the same time, however these are primarily designed to support carbohydrate needs during exercise. Drinks or liquid meal supplements can also be particularly good for those athletes who get particularly nervous or with gut issues.

Coaches:

Encourage your athletes to build a plan with an [Accredited Sports Dietitian](https://www.sportsdietitians.com.au) to deliver maximal pre – exercise fuelling and hydration strategies to boost their performance.

