



FACT SHEET

FOOD FOR YOUR SPORT - GOLF

ABOUT GOLF

Golf is primarily a game of skill that can be played for recreation as well as at elite level in national and international tour events and professional level on the world tour circuit. Golfers can play at a professional level either through an apprenticeship or by attending Player's School. Professional golfers can associate themselves with golf clubs and provide golf tuition and run clubs. Others spend their time competing within the professional circuit. A typical round of golf (18 holes) takes 3 to 5 hours to complete, depending on the skill level of the golfer. While the average length of a course is 7km, a golfer could walk 10 to 20 km (depending on the accuracy of shots) to complete a round. Whether you are walking and carrying your clubs, or riding in a cart, it is important to consider certain aspects of your nutrition during training & competition.

Recreational golfers practice their game by playing rounds. Professional golfers however can spend up to 8 hours a day on the golf course working on specific skills, playing practice rounds or competitions. During a tournament, most players will participate in a practice session at the end of the day's game. Complimentary training, including strength training, aerobic conditioning and flexibility also feature in most players' training schedules to strengthen muscles involved in playing the game, improve their endurance and minimise the risk of injury.

Tournaments are conducted as a single round on one day or as multi-day competitions of two or four rounds on consecutive days. In Australia, winter is the pro-am competition season and professional players typically travel on a circuit between club tournaments. During this season, a pro-golfer could play in ten tournaments, for a total of fifteen days of competition each month. The major international tournaments in Australia are played from January to March and from October to December, around the major season overseas from April to October.

As such, pro-golfers are on tour most of the year, travelling all over the world to compete in international tournaments. Playing conditions vary widely however most tournaments are played in the summer months, and often in the hottest part of the day, which highlights the requirement for sound drinking habits. Golfers' physiques vary widely and top players come in all shapes and sizes. Although the nature of the game is lower intensity, higher body fat levels may impair performance through greater heat intolerance, (and thus a greater susceptibility to physical fatigue) and an increased risk of injuries.

TRAINING DIET

Golfers of all levels need to eat well to perform at their peak. The nutrition plan for golfers is primarily to prevent fatigue and maintain concentration over 3 to 5 hours (during which a round is played) to optimise skill and performance. A balanced diet that provides a wide variety of foods, including carbohydrate and protein and smaller amounts of fat are the keys to optimal performance on course, along with a good hydration plan. A balanced diet for golfers includes:

- **Moderate amounts of foods rich in carbohydrates.**
Low glycaemic index (GI) choices such as pasta, multi-grain bread, porridge, baked beans can be better options to sustain training requirements and prevent fatigue. Find the Glycaemic Index fact sheet on the SDA web site www.sportsdietitians.com.au for more information.
- **Takeaway foods and processed snack foods such as lollies, crisps, pastries, cakes and soft drinks should be kept to a minimum.**
The focus should be on nutritious low-fat foods and include small amounts of foods rich in mono- and polyunsaturated fats e.g. avocado, nuts, plant-based oils and fish.
- **Consume alcohol in moderation if you choose to drink.**
A small amount of alcohol in the training diet is acceptable, but too much will lead to weight gain. Alcohol slows down rehydration, so is not the best choice immediately after exercise. Alcohol can also impair recovery so ensure that your rehydration and refuelling needs come first. Keep track of the number of drinks you have and avoid alcohol 24 hours before competition.



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FLUID NEEDS

Dehydration results in fatigue, impaired skill performance, impaired ability to focus and concentrate for longer periods, and can contribute to heat stress. As golf is largely a game of skill it is very important golfers consume adequate fluid to maintain hydration. Fluid requirements vary largely depending on the players' size, gender, time in play and environmental conditions. During competition and practice/training rounds access to adequate fluid on the course is an important part of maintaining hydration. Fluids should be carried in the golf bag and efforts should be made to keep the fluids cool to promote better intakes. Fluid requirements generally increase as the temperature increases so golfers should monitor their average sweat rates by weighing themselves before a round and then again after in different playing conditions. The weight deficit needs to be replaced by 1.5 times the amount of fluid lost, so:
1kg body weight lost = 1L fluids lost = 1.5L to rehydrate
Sports drinks or electrolyte replacement solutions are ideal for long practice rounds and competition as they replace fluid as well as carbohydrate and electrolytes. For more details see the Fluid in Sport factsheet at www.sportsdietitians.com.au

EATING BEFORE COMPETITION

Golfers can be expected to play a round for up to 5 hours so it is important to eat a pre-event meal which contains carbohydrate to maintain steady blood sugar & energy levels to prevent fatigue. Low GI carbohydrate foods may provide an advantage as they are digested slowly, delivering a more sustained fuel release, however the evidence is equivocal.

The pre-event meal should be something enjoyed by the player, does not cause stomach upset and contains some carbohydrate-rich foods to top up glycogen stores and blood glucose levels for optimal performance and concentration levels.

Some suggestions for a pre-event meal:

- crumpets with jam or honey + flavoured milk
- baked beans on toast
- breakfast cereal with milk
- bread roll with cheese/meat filling + banana
- fruit salad with yoghurt

EATING AND DRINKING DURING COMPETITION

A round of golf can last anything up to 5 hours so it is necessary to replace fluid and carbohydrate. It is also common that during a round, a golfer will miss a meal and therefore needs to replace these nutrients in a convenient form, usually before and after a round.

It can be important to replace carbohydrate during a round, if for

nothing else but to maintain concentration and accuracy of shots. Try having a small healthy snack every 4-6 holes or at the turn. Good snacks to have in a golf bag include cereal bars, fresh fruit, vegemite, peanut butter or jam, sandwich, dried fruit & nut mixes, pretzels, scones, pikelets, banana bread or savoury crackers.

RECOVERY

Although the 19th hole (the club room bar) is often the place for recreational golfers "recovery", professional golfers should look to recover fuel and fluid stores through good food choices immediately after the 18th hole before alcohol comes into the picture. Recovery choices are most critical when playing multiple rounds in one day or backing up for a 4-day tournament.

As a rule of thumb, aim to consume a recovery snack within 30 minutes of finishing a training session or competition. This snack should contain carbohydrates, protein and a source of fluid, for example;

- a meat & salad sandwich with a bottle of sports drink
- a bowl of cereal with fruit and milk
- cereal/muesli bars + 200g tub yoghurt + fluids
- piece of fruit + 300mL carton low-fat flavoured milk

The next meal should resume the normal training eating pattern, and should again contain carbohydrate-rich foods, a source of protein and fluids. Players should try to consume this meal within 3-4 hours of finishing a competition.

OTHER NUTRITIONAL TIPS

For professional golfers, life is spent travelling the globe on the international tour circuit, so eating in unfamiliar places is very common. It is wise to be well prepared when travelling internationally and it is recommended to research the destination, the common foods eaten normally and the foods that will be available at the venue and accommodation. Golfers may find it necessary to pack supplies of suitable snacks for on course (e.g. muesli bars, breakfast cereals) or preferred sports drink in their luggage.

The stimulating effect of caffeine may also be beneficial in golf where the ability to perform skills with accuracy late in the event is a key to successful performance. Small to moderate doses (around 1-2mg per kg body weight) may be beneficial to reduce perception of fatigue and enhance performance. Practice in training and minor tournaments first, it should not be a new thing going into competition. A known dose of caffeine is always preferable – see our fact sheet on Caffeine for more information.