



Eating and drinking during exercise – considerations for your athletes!

Depending on the goals of your athletes training or competition, eating and drinking during exercise may be required to help your athletes train and compete to their full potential.

Failing to fuel or hydrate correctly (either too much or too little) during exercise can result in:

- Earlier onset of fatigue
- Reduced speed / intensity
- Reduced endurance
- Poor concentration and decision making
- Skill errors
- Stomach/Gut upset or
- Fluid overload

When do your athletes need to eat or drink?

This depends on how long exercise goes for. Below is a general guide - encourage your athletes to discuss their competition plan with an [Accredited Sports Dietitian](#) including food vs supplement use.

- 0-60minutes: typically, no need to eat. Small amounts of fluid may be required.
- >60minutes: likely benefits to consuming fuel (carbohydrate) during the session. The exact amount required will depend on the duration and intensity of the session as well as individual tolerance. Fluid is likely to be required, but needs will depend on individual sweat rate. It is important for coaches to help identify/provide the opportunity for their athletes to drink and for athletes to enjoy the taste!
- Ultra-endurance (>4hr) and Multi-day events: fuelling and hydration practices in these events are crucial. An individualised plan should be a priority for your athletes and planned around specific logistical challenges.

This [infographic](#) from Asker Jeukendrup is a great visual representation of carbohydrate needs for varying exercise duration.

Drinking

Fluid needs during exercise are highly variable and will depend on your athletes' individual sweat rate, the intensity and duration of the exercise session, and the environmental conditions.

For longer and more intense sessions or events, particularly in hot and humid conditions, athletes need to be more proactive with their choice of fluids to avoid becoming dehydrated. Coaches need to ensure there are regular opportunities for athletes to drink.

What should athletes drink during exercise?

Water is generally a great choice for exercise that is less than 60 minutes, as well as during low-intensity sessions. Sports drinks may be an option when intensity and/or duration increases, as they can provide a practical way of meeting fluid, electrolyte, and fuel requirements. If sweat rates are high, but fuelling is not a priority, then electrolyte replacement drinks may be useful. Encourage your athletes to speak to an [Accredited Sports Dietitian](#) about developing a performance plan.

Eating

Sometimes athletes will need to eat during exercise to further boost energy levels. This extra fuel is generally only required when the training session is of high intensity or is longer than 60 minutes' duration, or both.

What should athletes eat during exercise?

Individual preference is important here, but as a rule food should be:

- High carbohydrate (fuel)
- Low in fibre and fat (for easy digestion)
- Familiar to the athlete

For example, simple sandwiches (e.g. jam or vegemite), bananas, muesli or fruit bars and fruit buns may be suitable options.

