

# FUELLING FRONTLINE HEALTHCARE WORKERS WITH SPORTS NUTRITION STRATEGIES

A critical aspect of managing the COVID-19 pandemic is that healthcare workers prioritise their own health so that they can effectively take care of others. In addition to the vital Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) they require, it also includes being adequately fuelled and hydrated to make decisions in high pressure situations, similar to an athlete on a sporting field, but with a lot more at stake. Using sports nutrition strategies is an incredibly effective way to do this!

Simone Austin, Advanced Sports Dietitian is giving her time and nutrition advice to help our emergency care workers. "They need to be eating and drinking, looking after their health, to perform at their best, just like the athlete's we work with do".

"It's like training for a marathon, these workers have a long journey, likely months still ahead. They need to recover after shifts, often having been on their feet for long periods of time. It is just like an athlete needs to recover after a training session, so they can get ready to go again".

We know the role diet can play in improving sports performance (1), such as spreading protein throughout the day, keeping glycogen stores topped up and staying well hydrated; all aimed to perform at one's best again and again. This is what we are asking many of our emergency healthcare workers to do.

A diet including wholegrain carbohydrate for fuel, protein for repair, healthy fats and of course plenty of vegetables, fruit and nuts for the vitamins and minerals is what every working body needs to avoid going into disrepair. This is also critical for the health and performance of our emergency workers.

Often meals will be missed due to limited time and busy schedules, making the quality of our snack foods even more important. Healthy snacks are vital and often the part of our diet that we put the least amount of effort into, grabbing highly processed, easy to access snack foods from a vending machine late at night.

An intensive care nurse from one of Melbourne's frontline hospitals reached out for some advice around what snack foods would help them with this marathon ahead. Simone Austin says, 'make some snacks mini meals as foods we make at mealtimes are usually more planned and nutritious.

- a bowl of soup with toast,
- half or a whole sandwich
- microwave scrambled eggs with some veggies thrown in
- leftover dinner from the night before
- bowl of porridge

It might mean a larger serve of lunch and splitting it into two half lunch serves, replacing the snacks altogether'.

An example day could be: 6am breakfast, 10am first lunch, 2pm second lunch, 6pm dinner, 8pm snack and swap times around if on night shift.

But if you like your snack times then Simone suggests choosing less packaged foods and grabbing:

- a handful or two of nuts
- a tub of yoghurt
- fruit (fresh, dried or canned) e.g. a punnet of berries to snack on
- corn on the cob
- raisin toast with banana and a glass of milk (or latte)
- Can of fish, crackers and cherry tomatoes

For more information: [www.sportsdietitians.com.au](http://www.sportsdietitians.com.au)



Keeping hydrated is also essential for concentration. Fill up a water bottle for to and from work and don't ignore your thirst, it is telling your body you need more water. The occasional coffee I am sure would also be enjoyed!

*To everyone out there, nourishing your body will nourish you physically and mentally and we all need that now!*

## References:

1. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4540168/>