



# FURY FASTPITCH

## Sports Nutrition Tips

There is no single magic food that will help you feel stronger, train harder and compete better. However, every food that you eat, in combination with when you eat it, can affect your athletic performance. Here are a few sports nutrition tips that may help you eat to win!

**Fuel:** The best fuels for your muscles are carbohydrates – either simple sugars such as the naturally occurring sugars in fruits and juices or complex carbohydrates, the unrefined grains and starches in whole wheat bread, brown rice, bran cereal, oatmeal, etc.. These provide not only energy but also important vitamins and minerals. If you fill up on too many refined carbohydrates (i.e. soft drinks, candy), you will fuel your muscles; but neglect the spark plugs that help your engine run smoothly. You store only carbohydrates – not protein or fats – in your muscles in the form of glycogen (muscle sugar). During hard exercise, you burn this glycogen for energy. If you totally deplete your glycogen stores, you feel overwhelmingly exhausted. Eating high carbohydrate foods (cereal, pancakes, vegetables, potatoes and pasta) can help prevent early exhaustion.

**Quick Energy:** Eating lots of sweets and sugary foods for quick energy before you exercise may hurt your performance. Here's why: After you eat any kind of concentrated sugar (i.e. soda, candy bars, etc.), your body secretes insulin, a hormone that carries the sugar from your blood into the muscles. Exercise, like insulin, also helps carry sugar into the muscles. The combined effect of insulin with exercise can cause your blood sugar to drop abnormally low. You may experience hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) and feel light headed, shaky, tired and uncoordinated. If you are craving an energy boost prior to exercise because you are hungry and feeling droopy, you don't have to eat sugary foods for energy. A simple snack of crackers, fruit, or bread can perk you up without risking negative hypoglycemic effects. The best solution to the quick energy problem is to prevent the need for an energy boost! Simply eat a bigger breakfast or lunch. Fuel up, rather than try to run on fumes! You will have time to digest this food and store it in your muscles. You will be ready for action – not hungry and tired prior to the afternoon or evening workout. You will be less likely to crave sweets for a quick fix because you will already have adequate energy.



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*What about Energy Drinks? According to researchers, energy drinks have negative impacts on the body that include dehydration, dizziness, loss of sleep, mood swings, increased blood pressure, nausea, irregular/rapid heartbeats and heart palpitations. Because they are diuretics, this can be especially dangerous if consumed while exercising – or on hot days – because the loss of that much fluid can cause a player to feel lightheaded or even to pass out. The levels of caffeine and other ingredients (which are not regulated) are not listed... so you don't know how it might affect a given player on a given day. As you build up a tolerance to these drinks, you need something more to get "up" for a game. Adequate nutrition, hydration, and sleep are all that is necessary for optimal performance on the field and a healthy lifestyle off the field.*

**Fluids:** You are unlikely to starve to death during exercise. However, you can endanger your health and performance due to lack of fluids. To prevent yourself from becoming dehydrated, drink lots of liquids before, during and after strenuous exercise. Water is always safe before exercise; water or sports drinks during exercise; water or juice afterwards. A good rule of thumb is that you should constantly take small drinks during strenuous exercise.

If you feel thirsty, you are already beginning to feel the effects of dehydration. Be prepared! Always bring your own water or sports drinks to practice.

**Dehydration** signs and symptoms include:

- ❖ Loss of endurance/skill, decreased mental concentration, and dizziness
- ❖ Headaches, muscle cramps, and nausea
- ❖ Apathy, fatigue, and confusion

**Pre-Game Meals:** When you are planning strenuous morning exercise (such as an early morning softball game), you will fuel your muscles best if you eat a high-carbohydrate meal the night before. By eating a hearty amount of pasta, potato, rice, noodles, bread and other carbohydrates for dinner, you will have a time to digest the food and store it in your muscles as glycogen. If you were to eat a big breakfast prior to the game, the food would sit undigested in your stomach and merely bounce along for the ride. This might cause discomfort or pit stops! You want to do most of your pre-game eating either the night before or at least 3-4 hours before an afternoon or evening game. Some athletes like to eat a small snack within 1-2 hours of exercise. This keeps them from feeling hungry and can help maintain a normal blood sugar level. Some popular choices include cereal



# FURY FASTPITCH

with low fat milk, toast or crackers. Avoid large fatty meals such as the traditional bacon and egg breakfast that tend to sit heavily in the stomach for 3–4 hours.

**Recovery Foods:** You should eat carbohydrate-rich foods within one to four hours after hard exercise to replace the glycogen that you burned off. Your muscles are most receptive to replacing this fuel at that time. A simple post-exercise refresher might be orange juice and bananas – rich sources of not only fluids and carbohydrates but also potassium and vitamins. Remember that only carbs quickly re-fuel your muscles and prepare you for tomorrow's workout. If you are tempted to choose a greasy burger with french fries for your recovery feast, choose instead carbohydrate-rich thick crust pizza with single cheese and veggie toppings, or a dinner that focuses on potato, bread, vegetables, juices and other carbohydrates.

**Nutritional Guidelines** In a nutshell, there are a few simple guidelines that you should always keep in mind when preparing for exercise:

1. For early morning games or practices, eat lightly at breakfast and load up on carbohydrates the evening before. After the game, eat a snack to help replenish lost energy.
2. For afternoon games or practices, eat a good breakfast that is high in carbohydrates and low in fats and sugars. Depending on the time of your games you should eat a light snack at least 1 hour before. If your game is in the late afternoon you may have time for a light meal, but be sure that you have at least 2 hours before the game if you are going to eat a meal.
3. For evening games or practices, eat a normal breakfast and lunch that is high in carbohydrates. Before the game eat a light snack and afterward eat a meal.
4. When eating to prepare for exercise, be sure to eat foods that are high in carbohydrates and low in sugar and fat. This is especially important when preparing for tournaments.
5. Understand the importance of proper hydration before, during and after all practices and games.
6. Completely avoid loading up on sugary junk foods and sodas before strenuous exercise and during tournaments!

*Source: Sports Medicine Systems, Inc. Nancy Clark, MSRD*