

The Best Foods to Eat Before and After Physical Activity

When we think about pre and post nutrition, it typically revolves around fueling for your best performance, and replenishing fluid (from sweat), glucose (from energy exertion), and protein (for muscle growth) for the recovery period afterwards. There is not a one size fits all nutrition plan for athletes but there are some common truths that apply for pre- and post-workout nutrition. In honor of National Nutrition Month, Health Initiatives dietitians Amber Johnson and Leah Galante provided the ins and outs of how to stay properly fueled both before and after to reach your workout! If you are interested in a more personalized program you can schedule a one on one nutrition counseling session at healthinitiatives.gatech.edu/nutrition.

Pre-Workout Nutrition:

Eating before physical activity provides your body with the fuel it needs for energy during the workout and a better recovery after. For the best results, it is good to have a meal or snack that is rich in [carbohydrates](#), [fluids](#), and [protein](#). The Sports Cardiovascular and Wellness Nutrition (SCAN) Practice Group of the [Dietetics recommendation](#) is to “Consume a carbohydrate-rich meal or snack before exercise to increase energy availability and speed post-exercise recovery. Try to limit foods that are high in fat or fiber, as well as eating immediately before you work out. Eating too soon before being active means your body will be digesting while your muscles are working, which decreases optimal performance and might cause discomfort. See a list of possible pre-workout meals [here](#).

Post-Workout Nutrition:

Eating after working out is also very important because it allows your body to replace the fluids and fuel it lost while being active. This period is also the time when your body’s hormonal response to carbohydrates switches from muscle breakdown to muscle building. Like your pre-workout food, carbohydrates, protein (which aid muscle recovery) and plenty of fluids are your best choice for an after-training meal or snack. [Aim to eat this within 15 minutes to an hour after working out](#), because that is when your body is best able to deliver nutrients to your muscles and cells. See a list of possible post-workout meals [here](#).

Exercise Hydration:

It is vital to ensure that you are staying adequately hydrated before, during, and after exercise. Hydration delays fatigue in the body, regulates body heat and reduces stress on your heart during your workout. Plus, it speeds up recovery time afterwards. If you are working out 2+ hours or 1+ hours in heat, the electrolytes found in sports drinks or other supplements, when discussed with a health professional, might be helpful for your body. The majority of the time, however, water is your best bet. Be sure to replace your fluids early and often during and after

activity, particularly when you're exercising in hot environments. Find more information on staying properly hydrated [here](#).

The best way to check up on how you should be replenishing after working out, more often than not, is simply to stay in tune with your body. Take mental note of your energy levels and thirst before and after exercising, while keeping in mind the types of foods you ate pre, post, and [during](#) your workout. Listen to what causes and helps with discomfort. Over time, you will likely develop an idea of the kinds of foods and water quantities that help you feel your best.