

MOORFOOT JUNIORS

A BASIC GUIDE TO EATING AND DRINKING BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER TRAINING OR COMPETING

An athlete needs fuel in the form of energy from food in order to train or compete well in the same way that a car needs fuel to go. If you do not have enough fuel stored in your body, you will run out of energy and will get tired sooner. You will not perform at your best.

You also need to eat the right type of fuel. (You don't put diesel in a petrol car.) Sugary foods might give you a quick energy boost, but the energy is quickly used up. Eating sugary foods before exercise can also give you a stitch which can be quite uncomfortable and sore and will probably slow you down. Athletes need food that releases energy slowly such as bread, potatoes, pasta, rice, porridge oats, cereals, yoghurts and of course fruit and vegetables.

But everyone is different. A certain way of eating and drinking which works well for some people might not suit others. Some people digest their food and get energy from it quickly. Others may need longer for their food to settle before they exercise. Sometimes you might feel like eating a full meal straight after training which is good. But it is also quite common for people not to get their appetite back for an hour or two after hard exercise. If you don't feel like eating a meal, it is important to find something which you can eat straight after training to start replacing the fuel you have used and to help your muscles recover.

Here are some basic rules which nearly everyone should follow, at least to begin with, or until you find out what suits you best.

D☺ eat a good breakfast every day, not just sugary cereal but things like porridge, weetabix, muesli, yoghurt, fruit, toast or bread, eggs (not fried). A cooked breakfast is fine, especially before a long run or really hard training session, but avoid fried food, have some bread or cereal too, and always leave enough time for it to be digested before you run.

BEFORE Training or Competing

D☺ eat a light meal 2 to 3 hours before training/competing (allowing for when you start warming-up). The main thing you eat at this time should be carbohydrate – pasta, rice, potatoes, bread, cereal or oats. This could be something like pasta with a tomato sauce, baked potato with baked beans, toast with scrambled eggs, rice with tuna and sweetcorn, a thick granary ham salad sandwich, or a hearty soup like lentil and vegetable and a roll. If you can't have a light meal like this, eat something convenient like a banana and a bowl of low-sugar cereal. Oatcakes are good and easy – try them with mashed banana and a glass of milk. Yoghurts are good too.

D☺ still eat something if there is less than 2 hours before training and you haven't eaten for a long time, but eat only a little and avoid sweet things.

D☺ keep drinking a little in the 2 to 3 hours before training/competing, especially if the weather is warm. Drink either diluting juice, water, or maybe a good sports drink like lucozade sport or powerade if you are doing a high level of exercise. (But **don't** drink so much that you feel bloated or can hear it gurgling around your belly when you run! Just take a few sips every so often to stop you getting thirsty.)

D☹ eat or drink anything which is high in sugar or fat in the hour or so before training/competing. No sweets, chocolate, biscuits, cakes, crisps or fizzy juice like Coke or ordinary lucozade. Avoid too much fresh-fruit juice which is also high in sugar. (Cereal bars might sound healthy but some of them are very sugary).

DURING Training or Competing

If you have more than one race in the day, you will need to top-up your energy level in between races. This will depend on how much time you have. Remember to allow for when you start warming-up, not just when you race. If you have say 2 hours, you could have something like a jam sandwich, a banana, or a brown ham roll and an oat-based cereal bar. If you only have around 1 hour, and not enough time to digest this sort of food, then don't eat as much. Try some dried fruit (raisins or dried apricots), half a banana or half a cereal bar as well as continuing to sip a "sports" drink.

D☺ remember to take a drink (or two) to training or the competition.

D☺ keep drinking a little, but again just sips in between runs.

D☺ plan what to eat and drink in between races.

D⊗N'T be tempted by the burger van even if it does smell good!

AFTER Training or Competing

It is very important that you re-fuel your body and top-up your energy level within 1 hour after hard exercise. This helps you recover more quickly and you will feel better the next day. You should also drink plenty of fluids.

If you have trained hard you can treat yourself to a little something sweet and sugary soon after training (but low-fat), especially if you do not feel like eating much straight away. A few jelly babies are good, fresh or dried fruit, a cereal bar, fruit-cake, a jam sandwich, yoghurt, or a fruit smoothie (but not all at once!). This is also a good time to have a "sports" drink, especially if you don't feel like eating.

You should try to have a decent meal within 2 hours of finishing and this should include some protein – meat, chicken, fish, eggs or cheese. This is the fuel which your muscles need after hard exercise. You should eat some carbohydrates too. If you have trained in the evening, **don't** have too heavy a meal immediately before going to bed but still have a snack. If you still find it difficult to eat much, try a home-made fruit milk-shake (not the powdered stuff). Make it with fruit, milk, yoghurt and add some oats or seeds.

D☺ drink plenty – a sports drink is good especially if you don't feel like eating straight away.

D☺ always eat something as soon as possible and within 1 hour, something sweet if you have exercised hard and can't eat a meal yet.

D☺ believe in the benefits of an old-fashioned jam sandwich and a glass of milk which is as good a "recovery snack" as all the expensive scientific sports bars you can buy these days.

D☺ try and eat a carbohydrate and protein-based meal within 2 hours.

D⊗N'T overdo the sweet things. Training hard or racing is not an excuse to stuff yourself full of Mars bars or chocolates afterwards.

D⊗N'T eat a big heavy meal just before you go to bed.

REMEMBER, EATING AND DRINKING THE RIGHT THINGS FOR YOUR EXERCISE IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS ALL THE TRAINING WHICH YOU DO. TRY DIFFERENT THINGS UNTIL YOU FIND WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU. GOOD LUCK.

P.S. DON'T FORGET YOUR 5-A-DAY FRUIT AND VEGETABLES!

