

SWIM-EATS – Part One

High Performance Nutrition for Swim Meets, competitions and carnivals: A Guide for Swimmers, Coaches, Parents and Clubs

By Wayne Goldsmith

Nutrition is an important area of successful sports performance in any sport. Swimmers need to eat nutritious foods to compete and train to the best of their ability. Coaches need to ensure that swimmers are eating well and rehydrating to complement their training program. Parents want to help their kids achieve their goals and are keen to support them in every possible way.

Swim Clubs and swimming organisations, selling food and drink at Swim Meets need to ensure that a variety of highly nutritious healthy options that can still generate income and raise funds are available to the swimmers.

Swim Meets, Swim Competitions and Swimming Championships are the places where all the vested interests in swimming nutrition come together: swimmers, coaches, parents and administrators. Everyone is looking for the same thing: how can we maximise the opportunity presented by the competition?

Swimmers want to maximise the opportunity of swimming fast at the Meet.
Coaches want to maximise the opportunities for the individual swimmers and team to compete successfully.

Parents want their kids to make the most of the competitive opportunity and swim well.

Administrators want to maximise the opportunity to generate income from the fund raising activities at the Meet.

Is it possible to develop an overall nutrition strategy to meet the needs of everyone?

Swimmers

A feature of successful athletes in any sport is how they take responsibility for their own performances. As swimmers get older and approach open level competition they should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own diet and nutrition program – to become coach and parent independent as far as food preparation and consumption are concerned.

On Meet day, swimmers should check their own bags to make sure all the fuel they will need over the day has been packed. This includes not only an adequate supply of food and drinks for the Meet day but enough nutritious snacks to cover the crucial post race recovery period. If for example, the last race of the day is 4:00pm and the swimmer is unlikely to eat dinner before 7:00pm, it is important that foods like fruit, sandwiches and other nutritious snacks are available to munch on between 4 and 7pm. (It is unlikely you can “ruin the appetite” of a competitive swimmer!).

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Athletes, by their actions, are above average people. They choose to push themselves to their limits and in doing so are “high performance” human beings. Just as High Performance motor vehicles use a high grade, high octane fuel, “high performance humans” need the best possible fuel to perform at their best.

However, athletes do not need to live a hermit type existence and abstain from all Take Away Foods, snacks, nibbles, lollies etc. The pressures of advertising and their peer group will make a totally junk food free existence near impossible for kids in the current times. The goal should be to practice sensible nutrition habits the majority of the time, to understand the basics of high performance eating and to be aware of the link between good food and fast swimming.

Immediately after racing, DRINK. Water is perfect, or try other fluids such as sports drink, cordial or fruit juice. Also eat something light within 10 minutes of finishing the race. This is the time when your body is best able to absorb and utilise new fuels.

If the Meet is two days or longer in duration, **RECOVERY NUTRITION** is an important part of racing successfully. Recovery nutrition is about planning an eating and drinking strategy that helps your body:

1. Recover from the physical stresses of racing;
2. Prepare for the racing to come.

This is also called the **REPAIR – PREPARE** approach to Swim Meet eating. Recovery nutrition is a technique which provides the swimmer's body with what they need to recover (eg carbohydrates to replace used up energy, proteins for muscle building and repair) and prepare for the next day of competition. In between races, recovery nutrition is about replenishing energy stores quickly and effectively so that the next race can be completed at maximum speed. Foods that aid in a recovery nutrition program between races include fruit, blended fruit packs, tinned fruits and sports drinks – things that are easy to digest and absorb into the body. To maximise the impact of these “recovery foods” they need to be eaten or drunk as soon as possible after racing.

A key element of a successful Swim Meet nutrition program is **EATING TIMING**. Swimmers need to ensure that their eating program is as finely tuned as their training and racing schedule. If competing early in the morning some swimmers may find it necessary to rise early (3-4 hours before warm up) eat, then go back to bed for a little more rest. Other athletes may chose to eat, then go for a short walk or jog to start the warm up / race preparation process going.

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Competition Schedule	What to Eat	When to Eat
Early Morning Heats (8:00am – 10:00am)	Breakfast – Light meal Complex Carbohydrates the focus	6:00am-7:00am
Afternoon Heats / Semi Finals / Finals (2:00pm-4:00pm)	Light lunch – Salad and Sandwiches. Cooked lunch of rice or pasta.	11:00am-1:00pm depending on start time. Allow approx 2 hours between eating and racing
Evening Events (6:00pm-9:00pm)	Late Afternoon Meal (Early dinner). Small quantities of rice, pasta, vegetables. Bread, bread rolls. Fruit.	4:00pm – 5:00pm

An Example of a Competition Eating Schedule

An important aspect of being a senior athlete is knowing what foods help you to swim at your best and when to eat them.

In minor Meets and lead up competitions try keeping a **NUTRITION DIARY** for the day before, the days of competition and the day after the Meet. Record what you eat, when you eat, how much you eat, how you felt and how you raced. By keeping the nutrition diary, you can evaluate what eating strategy works best for you.

TONY JOHNSON'S MEET NUTRITION DIARY – 2 day meet		
What I Ate and Drank	When I ate it	Comments
Coco Pops, Chocolate	Breakfast (around 7:00am)	Felt flat in warm up, raced poorly in 100 backstroke.
Fruit, Water, ½ a chicken salad sandwich	10:00am (30 minutes before 200 freestyle)	Felt better.
Pasta, Potato in Jacket, Fruit, Water, Juice	Lunch (around noon)	Raced ten minutes after big lunch. Felt heavy in the water and lethargic
Apple	2:00pm	Fired up. Felt strong.
Rice dish, vegetables, juice, ice cream and banana cake	6:00pm Dinner	I was starving!!! Ate everything in sight.
Wholegrain toast, Yoghurt, Fruit and juice	Breakfast (6:00am)	Felt great. The earlier breakfast really helped!

An Example of a typical Meet Nutrition Diary

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Coaches

Ensure you understand the basics of good nutrition and plan an effective education program for your swimmers. This includes a program of classroom education, Supermarket visits, teaching swimmers to read food labels and educating them about what's in food. Senior swimmers need to learn to cook a few basic meals (for example pasta and sauce, vegetarian fried rice, potatoes in their jackets and apple crumble) utilising low fat cooking and food preparation techniques. Parents of young swimmers also need to be aware of how to cook with less added fats and oils.

If you as a coach lack the necessary knowledge to take an active role in the nutrition education program of your club, enlist the services of a qualified sports dietician or sports nutritionist.

If a sports nutrition specialist is not easily available, read one of the many good books on the topic and prepare an athlete and parent nutrition education program that is swimming specific, easy to understand and simple to apply. Alternately approach the local hospital dietician and ask them to help out with your education program.

An important area of nutrition education is to educate parents. Remember that in general **KIDS DON'T SHOP and KIDS DON'T COOK!** Educating young swimmers is of limited value unless the parents are similarly educated and have the commitment to support their children's healthy eating program.

Do a pre-meet checklist for swimmers and parents to follow AND ask them to sign it before the swimmer leaves home for the pool.

JULIE SMITH'S SWIM MEET CHECKLIST FOR OCTOBER 16TH		
Food / Drink	How much?	Packed in my Swim Bag (Yes or No)
Water	1 litre	Yes
Juice	2 x 200 mls	Yes
Fruit	3 pieces	Yes
Sandwich	2 (chicken and salad)	Yes
Low Fat Fruit Yoghurt	One tub	Yes
Pre-cooked Pasta with tomato based sauce	250 gms in a sealed container	Yes
BAG CHECKED	Mum / Dad (sign)	Swimmer (sign)

Swimmer's Swim Meet Nutrition Checklist

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As an alternative, have a team breakfast on the morning of the Meet. If competing close to home, have the team breakfast in the Club Meeting room. Away from home, find a pleasant venue for the Team breakfast (beach, park, near a river) with an alternate site nominated in case of cold or rainy weather.

Ask each family to bring something for the team breakfast, (give them a list of what you want) – Smiths bring cereal, Jones family brings milk and Yoghurt, Wilsons bring Fruit and Juice etc. At the very least you can then be certain that the team has had one nutritious meal before competing. For a Medal winning Meet morning breakfast try some of these suggestions:

- ☞ Cereals (not the popular Chocolate or sugary ones). Try WeetBix, Vita Brits, Sustain, Just Right, Sports Plus.
- ☞ Reduced fat milk – e.g. Shape, Physical, Rev, Hi-Lo
- ☞ Low fat fruit yoghurt.
- ☞ Selection of fresh and/or tinned fruit (in natural juice). Sliced banana goes great on Weetbix and Vita Brits!
- ☞ Selection of bread, toast, crumpets, muffins, and spreads such as margarine, jam, vegemite and honey.
- ☞ Drinks – fruit juices, water, and milo.
- ☞ Spaghetti, baked beans or creamed corn on toast.
- ☞ Poached eggs or grilled tomatoes on toast.
- ☞ Pancakes or pikelets (with small amounts of syrup).

The team breakfast is also a great way to build team unity and go over team strategies for the Meet.

For a few laughs, select a swimmer at “random” and empty the contents of their swim bag in front of the rest of the team to check if they have packed it with all the healthy, nutritious food and drink they will need for the Meet. (By “random” it is a good idea to pre-select someone you know has done the right thing rather than publicly embarrass someone who hasn’t). You can do the same fun educational exercise and check the swimmer’s swim bag for other essential items, eg cap, goggles, towel, sun screen, hat etc etc to ensure they are packing for success!

If travelling to a Meet where you are likely to be arriving early in the morning or late in the evening have swimmers carry their first two meals with them. This reduces the temptation to seek Fast Food for dinner or breakfast. Arriving in a competition venue in the **evening** means that the only food outlets open will be Home Delivery Pizza and the Hamburger chains. Arriving at the competition venue early in the **morning** means coffee and donuts or the Fast Food chains.

Weeks of hard work and tough training may all be for nothing if the final two meals before competition are high fat, high salt and high sugar food choices.

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Have swimmers follow a set nutrition and rehydration routine around every race. Try the **R-D-T-E-R** routine (**RACE-DRINK-TALK-EAT-REST**). Swimmers race, then grab their drink bottles and take a sip, go the coach for the post race review, have a bite to eat then rest.

Keep your eyes open! Swimmers who are poorly prepared and have not brought healthy foods from home will be rushing to the Canteen or Shop for high fat / high sugar products early in the day.

Be aware of gimmicks and misinformation. Parents and swimmers can be easily influenced by the media and advertising campaigns to buying items that are not really high performance fuels. Food supplements, vitamins and minerals and fashionable products advertised by successful athletes rarely deliver on their promises of improved performance.

Parents' vulnerability to a quick fix, instant success products and promises means that coaches need to focus on parents at every stage of their nutrition education programs.

Swimmers don't always notice it, but sweating occurs when training and racing – even though the activity happens in the water. It is vital that a good supply of cool water, cordial, sports drink or juice is on hand at Swim Meets. Purchase a team 40-50 litre capacity Cooler, give the team captain or a committee member the responsibility for filling it and take it to every Meet (and also for cleaning it AFTER every Meet).

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