

TOP NUTRITION TIPS TO GET YOU THROUGH A HARD MORNING WORKOUT

7/14/2016



CHRIS ROSENBLOOM, PHD, RDN, CSSD

“A spoonful of peanut butter,” “16 ounces of water,” and “a slice of American cheese.” The common thread among these three things is that they are breakfast choices of three different teen swimmers who complained they didn’t have enough energy to get through an early-morning workout. When asked why these choices, the response was not what I expected to hear. I thought they would say they had no time to eat, or they weren’t hungry early in the morning; a common complaint of athletes who rise before the sun to workout. No, they were worried about consuming anything with sugar. They feared that eating sugar-containing carbohydrates would cause them to “crash” mid-workout. This fear is fueled by some coaches, parents, and trainers who believe that eating sugar before a workout will elevate blood sugar to sky-high levels, leading to a blood sugar crash a little while later.

Our body is remarkable at controlling blood sugar and keeping it in a normal, healthy range. Unless you have diabetes, naturally released hormones keep your blood sugar tightly regulated. When you eat carbohydrates, and they get digested and absorbed into the blood, insulin is released to help the sugar get from the blood to tissues for energy; insulin is like a key that helps unlock the entrance to cells where sugar is needed. When blood sugar is in the low range of normal, like in the morning after sleeping, another hormone called glucagon is released to breakdown stored carbohydrate to keep blood sugars regulated.

Eating carbohydrate-rich foods or beverages within hours of exercise helps maintain blood sugar during long workouts so you don’t have to break down all of your stored carbohydrate. Compared to water or fasting, eating carbohydrate-rich foods improves performance; it doesn’t hurt performance. Carbohydrate is needed by your muscles and the brain. Your brain prefers to run on glucose (sugar), so athletes who eat carbohydrates report feeling stronger and feeling better than those who don’t eat carbohydrates.

The guidelines for carbohydrate intake are based on both the availability of carbohydrate to sustain exercise and the timing before exercise. If you eat a balance of carbs, protein, and healthy fats between training sessions, you maximize your muscle glycogen stores so you will be ready for the next practice or competition. Consider this strategy:

- 1 hour before practice, eat 0.5 grams of carbohydrate per pound of body weight; for a 150-pound swimmer, that is 75 grams of carbohydrate or 8-ounces of fruit-flavored yogurt and a medium

apple. (For more on carbohydrate-rich food choices for athletes see <http://www.nutrition411.com/articles/carbohydrates-competitive-edge>)

- If you are unable to eat any breakfast, then eat at least get 30 grams of carbohydrate 5-10 minutes before a workout (mini-bagel or 2 fig cookies or ½ cup of cran-apple juice all give you about 30 grams of carbohydrate). Make up the carb intake after practice to refuel muscles.
- Liquids are more rapidly absorbed than solid foods. Consider smoothies, bottled juices, or liquid replacement meals as a substitute when you can't make time to eat solid foods.

Chris Rosenbloom is a professor emerita of nutrition at Georgia State University and a registered dietitian. She provides sports nutrition consulting services to sports teams, athletes and coaches. To learn more, visit her website at <http://chrisrosenbloom.com/> or follow her on Twitter @chrisrosenbloom. She welcomes questions from swimmers, parents and coaches at chrisrosenbloom@gmail.com.