

Savvy Snacking for Swimmers

By Chris Rosenbloom, PhD, RDN | Monday, December 30, 2019

Last month we wrote about the heavy energy (calorie) demands of young swimmers, and several parents have written asking for calorie-rich and nutrient-dense snacking ideas.

Many young swimmers struggle to eat enough at meals. Early morning practice, abbreviated school lunch periods, and afterschool practice and homework means snacking takes on an important role when meals are missed.

I'm using the criteria of good taste, good nutrition, and energy-rich to support practice and promote recovery in choosing these snacks.

- **Cereal and Milk:** I often hear that young people don't eat cereal because they don't want to be bothered with grabbing a bowl and a spoon, but that is crazy. Cereal and milk are perfect pairings for carbohydrate and protein. When choosing cereal, look for those with less than 2 teaspoons of added sugar (about 10 grams). Many favorite cereals fit that criteria, from Kashi to Cheerios to Cinnamon Oatmeal Squares to Great Grains Crunchy Pecan. We used to tell athletes that they had outgrown cereals that feature cartoon characters, so that might be a good rule to picking a better-for-you cereal.

As for the milk, whole or 2% milk provides more calories, and emerging research suggests that the fat in milk isn't as unhealthy as we used to think. The matrix of all the nutrients in milk make for a healthy package. If you prefer plant-based milk, make sure you choose one that provides protein – at least 8 grams per serving – so it is comparable to real dairy milk. Your almond milk might contain less protein and fewer almonds than you think!

- **Flavored nuts:** Have you tried shelled pistachios in flavors like chili-roasted or honey roasted? Packed with healthy fats and calories, give shelled nuts a try. This time of year, dried candied walnuts, great for a snack or snack topping (vanilla ice cream with candied walnuts? Yes!)

Smoked almonds, salt and pepper cashews, even pickle-flavored peanuts... Whether you like salty, sweet, spicy or smoky, there is a nut for you. For those with nut allergies, try soy nuts.

- **Hummus:** has come a long way since plain and roasted red pepper were the only two choices. Hummus is a high-calorie, protein-rich snack. Pair with pretzel thins or pita chips to boost the carbs.
- **Good old PB&J** works at any time. Vary your breads, from toasted sour dough to soft wheat bread, mixing it up to keep it interesting. Creamy or crunchy peanut butter with grape jelly or strawberry jam a winning snack for every swimmer.
- **Fruit juice** is often thought of as unhealthy because it is 100% sugar, but it is naturally-occurring sugar from fruit, and it contains most of the goodness of fruit from the vitamins, minerals, and plant-based nutrients. It is only missing the fiber. It is a great way to pack in calories post-practice when appetite might be suppressed. Try pomegranate juice, blueberry juice, grape juice, or tart cherry juice for the extra benefit of polyphenols, which antioxidant compounds with anti-inflammatory properties.

Snack on, and let me know your favorite snacks!

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