

SWIM-EATS – Part Two

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

By Wayne Goldsmith

Parents

Parents play a significant role in the nutrition and lifestyle habits of swimmers (their children). Parents can have an important impact on their child's eating choices in many ways:

By setting an example with their own diet. It is well established that children, particularly young children are influenced by their parents behaviours. This applies to social behaviours, beliefs and lifestyle habits. Parents who consistently eat high fat, high salt, high sugar, low fibre foods are setting a decidedly unhealthy example for their kids to follow. (This also applies to smoking and whilst this is not strictly a nutrition issue it is very definitely a health issue).

By purchasing healthy nutritious food. This is one key area where parents can directly influence the nutrition program of their children. In most households mum and dad are responsible for selecting and buying the families food each week. In this regard, mum and dad can be positive role models, or quite easily become a negative influence on the family's eating habits. If you don't buy chocolate biscuits, frozen pizza and sugary breakfast cereals, the kids can't eat them. **It then becomes a matter of a battle of wills between parents and kids.** The pressures of television advertising and the influence of their friends and peer group may have children demanding non healthy food choices, but in the family home, parents should take the hard option of insisting on high performance nutrition.

(Try not to go grocery shopping when you are hungry. Research suggests that if you shop when you are hungry you are more likely to make poor food selections – usually of the high fat variety).

By not promising Junk food as rewards for good performances. This is crucial. Most diets in Western Society fail. Recent statistics suggest that over 90% of people trying to lose weight do not achieve their goals. Much of the blame comes from the way we approach “treats” with children.

As a child, everyone has had an Auntie or Uncle or Grandparent say, “You're such a good boy or good girl, here's a chocolate”, or “Your school grades are so good, let's celebrate with pizza and garlic bread”. From an early age, this “**do something good – eat something bad as a reward**” mentality develops.

Adults who fail in their efforts to lose weight often do so because they reward any weight loss with junk food, chocolates, cake etc. This is an extension of the eating habits learned and reinforced in childhood.

Be wary of products promising quick easy results. All parents want the best for their children and as a result are vulnerable to advertising and marketing of sports nutrition products in the belief that they are helping their children.

SWIM-EATS – Part Two

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

The MID MEET MAIN MEAL - MMMM:

Often at two day meets with families travelling away from home, the “MID MEET MAIN MEAL” is the most important eating occasion. Generally the MID MEET MAIN MEAL is the Saturday evening meal that swimmers and families share after a full day of competition (Day One). This meal is a time for everyone to unwind and talk about swim times, races and the things that happened on day One and to fuel up for the second day of competition.

There are several options for the “MMMM”. If dining out, coaches, swimmers and parents need to be aware of the positives and negatives of their eating options and be prepared to exercise control and discipline where unsuitable foods are available.

Dining Option	Food Selection	Positives	Negatives
PIZZA BUFFET	Pizza, Garlic Bread, Pasta, Fries, Salads, Desserts, Soft Drinks	Quick, Inexpensive. Wide choice. Salads usually available. No need to dress up.	Pizza is high fat. Easy access to large amounts of high fat foods demands great discipline from swimmers. Opportunity for eating too much and too much of the wrong foods. Dessert bar is too tempting!!! High salt content.
SIZZLER / BUFFET STYLE RESTAURANTS	Just about anything	Quick, inexpensive, wide choice. Salad bars usually great. No need to dress up.	Access to large quantities of high fat foods (desserts, rich pasta sauces, potato skins) a problem.
ITALIAN RESTAURANT	Pasta, Breads, Veal, Meat dishes, chicken dishes	Can be an excellent high carbohydrate meal. Pasta, salad with no dressing and plain bread is an excellent combination.	High fat cream based sauces, garlic bread with lots of butter. Some meats (Italian sausages) will be high fat and high salt. Dressing up can be an inconvenience.
ASIAN STYLE RESTAURANTS	Noodles, meat fish and chicken dishes, rice, vegetables.	Can be an excellent high carbohydrate meal. Stir fry cooking techniques result in full flavoured highly nutritious dishes.	High fat fried entrees (spring rolls, dim sum). High salt meat dishes common. Dressing up can be an inconvenience.
TAKE AWAY CHICKEN OUTLETS / HAMBURGER CHAINS	Chicken (fried, deep fried, roasted, baked), vegetables, fries, salads. Hamburgers, fries,	Quick, inexpensive. Chicken Barbequed over hot coals and with skin removed is an excellent choice. Baked potatoes and vegetables if available a good preference over fries.	High fat and salt crumbed or fried chicken. Fries usually accompany most dishes. Salads usually pre-prepared with high fat dressings. Burgers are usually high fat and “special” sauces also high in fats. Small cut French fries very high in fat and salt.

Typical food choices (Take Aways) available for Mid Meet Main Meals

SWIM-EATS – Part Two

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Be prepared to ask the restaurant for changes and modifications to their printed menu. For example ask for salads with no dressing (or have the dressing served on the side). Ask for meals to be cooked with less oil and for dishes to be prepared with little or no salt. If you must have salad dressing or salt for taste, adding them yourself means you can control your intake of these products.

Get in the habit of asking waiters and waitresses how the food will be cooked BEFORE you order it. Be confident knowing that as you are paying for the food, you have the right to have input into how it will be prepared, (just beware of temperamental chefs!!!).

When selecting the venue for the “MMMM” do not allow swimmers performances to dictate where and what you will eat. The “**if you do a PB we will all go to a popular hamburger restaurant**” promise made by parents to swimmers may achieve short term success but it leads to long term eating lifestyle problems.

Parents – PLEASE – do not reward GREAT SWIMMING with JUNK FOOD.

An alternative to eating out with the team for the “MMMM” is the team dinner or team barbeque that is catered by the families of swimmers and by club management. The great positive is that the coach and families have a good deal more control over the quantity and quality of food being selected and eaten by the swim team. The down side is that the parent cooked “MMMM” requires more planning and forethought as foods may need to be transported from home.

This does not present any real problems if travelling relatively short distances to the Meet by car, but is difficult to manage if longer journeys to distant competitions are necessary.

If preparing meals for a team when competing away from home, delegate the responsibility for the various contents of the meal to swimmers’ families, eg John’s dad buys the salads and cuts up the vegetables, Julie’s mum leaves the Meet early to buy fresh seasonal fruit and prepare a fruit platter, etc. Often the MMMM is a last minute, unplanned and unco-ordinated meal leaving the swimmers with few options and what options they do have are usually the Fast Food ones.

A little planning will go a long way to ensuring a successful Meet and a sensible high performance nutrition program for the swimmers!

Glucose Tablets. Parents are often taken in by the “high energy” promises and packaging of glucose products in the belief that it will give their child a lift or boost on race day. These products are very high in sugar (the “OSE” on the end of food ingredients identifies it as sugar – maltOSE, fructOSE, dextrOSE etc). These products are of doubtful, if any, value.

SWIM-EATS – Part Two

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

Sports Drink. The marketing of sports drinks promotes the idea that drinking them will provide a “boost” or make a big impact on the performance of athletes. Whilst sports drinks do appear to have an important role in post race recovery, they are not a miracle product that will compensate for poor dietary choices. If intending to use a sports drink on race day, swimmers should experiment with the different brands, concentrations and quantities in training to see what works best for them.

Chocolate Bars. Another great swimming myth is the “Chocolate Bar rush”. Often parents will give their children chocolate before a race to try and catch a sugar “rush” which will give them an edge in racing. This again is not correct and in fact, the chocolate bars may impact on blood sugars to an extent that the swimmers perform poorly.

Clubs and Caterers

The greatest challenge for Swim Clubs and swimming organisations is to provide healthy food options at swim Meets that also generate profit. For most clubs their single most important fund raising event on the annual program is when they host a swim Meet. The temptation is to sell the foods that are easiest to prepare and can generate the highest profits for the club. Pre frozen pies, sausage rolls, chips and other fried foods can generate a high profit but at what cost to the performance (and health) of the swimmers.

When catering for swim meets try to provide a range of healthy, nutritious foods for swimmers to snack on over the day. This includes providing swimmers with adequate fluids, other than soft drinks before during and after competition.

Typically the foods that are available at Swim Meets are high in salt, high in sugar, low in fibre, high in fat and low in complex carbohydrate are easy to sell, easy to keep warm, easy to store, taste great and make good profits for the club.

One idea for clubs might be to allocate a room (or tent) with a cafeteria / buffet style food serving area for swimmers to access. Athletes pay a small amount (three to five dollars) to enter the buffet area and fill a plate with as much healthy food as they can carry. This is an easy way to provide quick service to swimmers and provide a variety of food choices (and serving sizes). It is also cost effective as the bulk of the food choices can be salads, vegetables and breads.

Some SWIM EATS buffet ideas include:

Bread and bread rolls, pita breads, Lebanese bread, Turkish bread, and French sticks. Try a mixture of white, wholemeal, multi grain and light rye to encourage choice. Leave the breads unbuttered to try and encourage a low fat approach to swim Meet eating.

SWIM-EATS – Part Two

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

Things to put on and in the breads include:

- ✓ Lean meat/ham/chicken.
- ✓ Reduced fat cheese in slices or grated.
- ✓ Tinned fish like Tuna or Salmon. The fish should be in brine or water – not oil or mayonnaise.
- ✓ Egg (hard-boiled and sliced).
- ✓ Lots and Lots of Salad choices – tomato, lettuce (all varieties available), grated carrot, sprouts, beetroot, coleslaw, cucumber, avocado, pineapple, nuts, dried fruits. Be inventive!!!!
Try to limit shop prepared salads that may be dressed in mayonnaise high in fats and oils.
- ✓ For desserts:
- ✓ Muffins – e.g. oat and honey, Fruit muffins - banana, date and walnut, strawberry, blueberry. Fruit cake, banana cake and carrot cake may be a good alternative – (try to get them made with low fat techniques).
- ✓ Fresh fruit – Whatever is in season and lots of it.
- ✓ Drinks:
- ✓ Water, Fruit Juice, Cordial.

HOT CATERING

Swim Clubs often run barbeques or prepare hot foods for sale at Meets. The challenge here again is to provide a wide range of choice, offer a selection of healthy nutritious high performance foods yet maximise fund raising.

Traditional Hot Food	Healthy Alternative	Cooking / Serving Ideas
Sausages / High Fat Meats fried in oil	Lean meats, chicken breasts, Grilled or Chargrilled if possible	Trim fat off meats and remove skin from chicken
Pre packaged Hamburgers	Homemade Hamburgers with lean mince (Grilled), Vegetable burgers.	Use low fat mince and avoid coating the outside with breadcrumbs
Chips or Fries	Baked Potatoes in the their skins (unpeeled)	Serve with some low fat cheese or natural yoghurt
Hot Dogs	Lean, grilled sausages	Serve on a wholemeal or multi grain bread roll
Pies and Sausage Rolls	Vegetable Quiche	Made with fresh vegetables, eggs and low fat dairy products. Herbs for flavour.

Some ideas for Hot Catering at Swim Meets

SWIM-EATS – Part Two

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

Other ideas for hot catering include:

Pasta with low fat, tomato based sauces. This is a very cheap hot meal, easy to prepare and has a good profit margin (\$1.00 - \$2.00 per bowl or plate). Serve with salad and fresh bread.

Rice (using low fat cooking techniques) stir fried with lots of fresh vegetables.

Curries, stews, casseroles with low fat meats, fresh vegetables and cooked with little or no oil. Serve the dish a 1-4 ration with rice, pasta or noodles, eg one scoop of curry / stew / casserole – four scoops of rice. Again this dish is a very profitable one for the club bank balance (\$1.00 - \$2.00 per bowl or plate).

Kebabs / shashliks / meat sticks - Cooked on skewers with alternating two vegetable pieces / one meat piece, eg Slice of red capsicum / slice of green capsicum / piece of chicken (skin removed) / small onion / ¼ tomato / piece of chicken.

Apple / berry crumble with low fat ice cream / fruit yoghurt.

Fresh fruit for dessert.

Healthy eating is only part of the total performance package of any athlete. Just as having a great race start is not enough to win races without the skills, techniques, mental strengths and fitness level required to complete the distance, eating well by itself will not make you a great swimmer.

An attitude of high performance eating will however go a long way to making you a high performance athlete.

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