

# What to Eat Sheet

One of the most common question families new to the sport of swimming will ask: what do we eat?

The swim meets are hours-long, and generally right over dinner time. While for a short time, we must forgo the family “dinner ‘round the table”, what the swimmers are eating is still very important and eating or not eating will greatly affect their performance in the meet. Food gives us energy and it is important to consider carefully your choices: if your body runs out of energy, it will start to slow down and become tired.

To simplify a somewhat complex matter, a body is fueled by carbohydrates, protein, and plenty of water. Eating the right foods at the right times can greatly enhance your swimmer’s performance as well as how they feel overall.

Here are some tips to help you make healthy food choices while on the run (or in the swim, as the case may be).

**Eat dinner about 1 hour prior to warm ups.** For dual meets, warm ups generally begin around 5pm, so around 4pm you’ll want to have a light dinner consisting of plenty of fruits and vegetables, carbohydrates, and a little protein. (Carbohydrates are your “energy” foods- whole grains, fruits, vegetables, for example. Proteins swimmers should eat would include fish, chicken, beans, low-fat cheeses and yogurts). You do not want this meal to be steak and mashed potatoes- we don’t want the swimmer to sink! Some ideas:

- Sandwich on whole grain bread with lean meat and lettuce and tomato
- Yogurt with or without granola, or try a yogurt fruit smoothie
- Raw veggies such as carrots and celery sticks go with everything!
- Pasta (whole grain noodles tossed with olive oil and veggies)- easy on the cheese, please!
- Whole grain cereal or granola with sliced fruit and milk
- Whole grain crackers and low-fat string cheese
- Fresh fruits (some favorites are watermelon, cantaloupe, blueberries, strawberries, grapes, orange slices, etc.)
- Vegetable soup
- Salad with a variety of veggies (try some avocado – a nutrient dense super food- chicken, seeds, and dried fruit for added interest)
- Whole grain Bagels with egg or tuna salad
- Water, Water, Water

**Dinner foods to avoid: heavy or high-fat foods (greasy) such as cheeseburgers, pizza, large portions of beef or sausage, and French fries.**

**Snacking is a very important part of maintaining stable energy levels.** Swim meets be 3-4 hours long, and there can be quite a bit of time in between your swimmer’s events. Healthy snacks consumed throughout the meet help maintain blood sugar levels, and provide the fuel that your child’s body needs for a burst of speed when they need it. Some healthy snack ideas are:

- Fresh fruits and veggies
- Whole grain crackers and granola bars
- Almonds and other heart-healthy nuts (such as cashews and pistachios) \*Be conscious of other swimmers with potential nut allergies, please
- Pasta salad
- Dried fruit
- Sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds
- Fig Bars
- Rice cakes or popcorn
- Whole grain pretzels
- Water, Water, Water

**Snacks to avoid during the meet** (consume these items sparingly after the meet):

- **Candy**
- **Soda**
- **Potato chips, French fries, or any high fat food**
- **Doughnuts, Cake, Cookies**

You will notice that drinking water is highly encouraged. Swimmers do sweat! With the warm temperatures of summer, plus the fluid loss from sweating, a swimmer can become very quickly dehydrated if not careful. It is important (especially when it's very hot) to be drinking water ALL DAY. Nearly all of your body's functions perform better when well hydrated- drinking plenty of water improves muscle and brain performance, and keeps you running at top speed. Be wise in your selection of sport's drinks, as some of them contain high amounts of sugar, corn syrup, food dyes, and chemicals, and even caffeine which can be harmful to young athletes.

We do realize, it is summer, and it is very difficult to avoid those "fun" foods- but it is helpful to your swimmer to plan accordingly, provide nutritious meals and snacks, and save the treats for after the competition is over.