



Swimming requires massive amounts of energy, whether it's an elite-level practice or an age group practice. Because of this high energy expenditure, swimmers need to take the right steps to replenish the nutrients they lose.

Swimmers can burn large amounts of calories during practice. Because of this incredible energy expenditure, proper nutrition is essential to rebuilding and recovering.

Nutrition is the cornerstone of every athlete's performance...

Detrimental Nutrition Mindsets

Two common detrimental mindsets swimmers have regarding meals fall on opposite ends of the spectrum.

The first is, "I swim hard every day so I can eat whatever I want. I work it off when I swim."

While it may be true, you are burning a lot of calories, you aren't refueling with the necessary nutrients to keep you healthy and swimming fast. Not to mention eating loads of sugar and other processed foods will hinder your swimming and make you feel sluggish and slow.

The other mindset is: "I worked super hard in practice, so I don't want to ruin it by eating too much. I won't eat or will eat much less than what I probably should."

You can't expect your body to be able to put maximum effort into a practice or a race if it doesn't have enough fuel to do so.

It doesn't matter how much or how hard you swim or train, you will not reach your potential without proper nutrition.

What Should Swimmers Eat?

You may be asking now, "What should my swimmer eat?"

Swimmers who are training intensely should eat four to seven light meals a day. Eating large meals or too much in one sitting will leave the swimmer feeling lethargic and will inhibit performance. These meals should consist of foods that are easy to digest.

Carbs

rice
cereal
pasta
potatoes
beans
peas
lentils

Carbohydrates should make up one half of a swimmer's diet as it is the fuel swimmers need to get through a tough practice or meet. Carbs are stored as glycogen in the muscles and liver and is the fuel our body uses throughout our day – especially during a workout. After the workout, energy sources will be running low and will need to be replaced. Some good sources of carbs are rice, cereal, pasta, potatoes, beans, peas, and lentils.

The other half of a swimmer's meal should consist of protein, healthy fats, vegetables, fruit, whole grains, vitamins, and minerals.

According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 0.5 to 0.7 grams of

carbohydrates should be consumed for every pound of body weight.

Protein repairs and rebuilds the muscles after the stresses of training in addition to warding off soreness. The building blocks of proteins are amino acids, which are the main components of muscular growth and repair. Protein also supports and boosts the immune system as well as quenches those annoying hunger pangs plaguing swimmers during practice. Some sources of protein are lean meats, fish, eggs, and low-fat dairy. One supplement we are often asked about is BCAAs or Branched Chain Amino Acids, if your swimmers diet consists of good amounts of meat and other protein sources, you do not need to worry about supplementing their diet with BCAAs.

Swimmers should also drink water often to stay hydrated, sipping on their water bottles throughout the day to replenish sweat loss (yes, it is possible to sweat in the water).

When you feel an itchy feeling on your head, neck, or shoulders while swimming- you are feeling the sweat on your skin reacting with the pool chemicals. Many athletes don't think about replacing electrolytes and other minerals lost in sweat, most notably sodium and potassium. Due to misinformation regarding sodium consumption, most athletes don't consume enough sodium in their normal diet. You can add some salt and glucose to your meals and beverages to increase absorption and replenishment. During long distance sporting events, many athletes even take salt tablets to help prevent cramping and replenish the minerals being lost through sweat.

A properly fueled body will result in better performance during practice and competition.

An Ironman is a long distance triathlon race that can take up to 12 hours for many to complete. These are some of the most elite athletes in the world; nutrition is considered by many of them to be the fourth discipline, just as important as your ability to swim, bike, and run.

Protein

lean meat
fish
eggs
low fat dairy

What to Eat....

the day before a meet

Swimmers should eat foods high in complex carbs and drink fluids. Swimmers should also be eating little and often to keep blood sugar levels steady, and fuel muscles.

Stick to foods that are familiar, and avoid big meals to avoid feeling sluggish on race day.

complex carbs

Oatmeal
Brown Rice
Potatoes w/ Skin
Whole Wheat Bread & Pasta
Grapefruit
Apple
Banana
Blueberry
Cantaloupe

for breakfast before a meet or practice

Even if you're too tired or nervous to eat, you need to - even if it's just a little bit.

Eating breakfast kick starts your metabolism and helps your body prepare for what is coming while helping maximize performance and training.

easily digestible

Cereal
Oatmeal
Banana
Toast
Fruit
Yogurt
& if you're really lacking an appetite
Milk Tetra Packs
Smoothies

during a meet

Swimmers should make sure to eat and drink between events to aid in recovery and ward off dehydration.

After a race, swimmers should eat as soon as possible for recovery. Snacks should consist of complex carbs and proteins, not simple sugars or foods high in fat.

If a swimmer cannot do solids between races, try diluted juice with a pinch of salt, chocolate milk, or a smoothie.

Juice
Yogurt/Apple Sauce
Fruit

*snacks should be light and easy to digest *

less than 1 hr between events

more than 1 hr between events

Pasta
Sandwich
(whole grain or whole wheat bread)
Sushi

after meets and practice

Foods eaten after practice or a meet should contain carbs for fuel and protein for muscular repair and growth. The swimmer should also be drinking water to stay hydrated.

Fruit Smoothies

Yogurt

Fruit

Toast w/

Jelly

Peanut Butter & Bananas

carbs

proteins

Wheat Pita & Hummus

White Meat Sandwich

Chocolate Milk

Tuna Salad

Eggs

Nuts

Edamame

Smoothie w/ Dairy

before meets and practice

Swimmers should eat a high carb meal two to four hours prior to a practice or meet. This meal should be low in fiber and fat. One to two hours before, swimmers should follow up with a light snack.

Whole Grain Cereal

Fruit

Oatmeal w/

Banana

Cinnamon

Swimmers

It's time to stop ignoring your nutrition. If you continue to train and implement the above recommendations into your diet, you will be able to swim faster and longer because of it. Don't take your swimming nutrition for granted, it is just as important as your hours in the pool.

Duran, Bailey, et al. "The Big Deal about a Swimmer's Nutrition: What to Know." *Swimming World News*, 25 Apr. 2022, <https://www.swimmingworldmagazine.com/news/the-big-deal-about-a-swimmers-nutrition//>.