

WHAT TO EAT BEFORE AND AFTER EXERCISE

How diet can help fuel the body for activity and recover better afterwards.

Eating the right foods and staying hydrated before, during, and after exercise can really help with energy levels, keep you from feeling tired, and support you to recover faster. What people can tolerate eating before and after exercise differs from person to person, but this fact sheet is here to guide you on what to eat and drink, and the best times to do so, to get the most out of your physical activity.

Before Exercise

Just like cars, we need fuel to function and be active. Carbohydrates are our main source of energy, so consuming a carbohydrate-based meal or snack before exercise can reduce fatigue, improve recovery time, and even increase our ability to work out harder.



What to eat:

Go for carbs for sustained energy—try fruit, bread, pasta, rice, cereal, or a smoothie. Make sure you drink enough water before engaging in any physical activity.




When to eat:


Eat a larger meal 3–4 hours before exercise or a snack 1–2 hours before to allow for digestion.



During Exercise


The most important thing to remember is to stay hydrated by sipping on water as you exercise – especially if you're sweating. It is true that we lose more than just water when we sweat, but research has shown sports drinks are really only beneficial for elite athletes losing lots of water and electrolytes. For most people, water is as effective and skips the added sugar.


 **What to drink:**
Water.


 **What to eat:**
Nothing. But, if you are exercising for longer than 60–90 minutes, consider having a small snack that is lower in fibre and fat so it is easier to digest.

After Exercise

Soon after exercising, it is recommended you consume a serving of high-quality protein along with carbohydrates. Studies have shown that this is beneficial even after low to moderate aerobic exercise, such as walking.

 **What to eat:**
Focus on a combination of carbohydrates to replenish energy stores and protein to repair muscles. You could try yoghurt and fruit, a chicken wrap, a protein ball or smoothie. Aim for a well-balanced meal and include vegetables.

 **What to drink:**
Continue to drink water after exercise.

 **What about a protein shake?**
Our muscles need a high-quality source of protein after exercising to help with recovery. A protein shake can be an easy way to consume protein, but remember that a boiled egg on toast or a tin of tuna on crackers will do the same job.



The ins and outs of digestion and exercise

Moderate exercise improves digestion and helps regulate bowel movements. But, timing matters. That's because when we exercise our digestion slows down, which means food can sit in our stomach for longer than usual and cause discomfort during, and after, a workout.

When to eat:

A snack 1–2 hours before exercise gives food enough time to digest and provides the body with the energy it needs to complete the activity.

Additional tips

Moderation: While it's important to replenish nutrients after exercising, be mindful of portion sizes to avoid consuming more energy than you used.

Variety: Include a variety of foods in your diet to ensure you're getting a range of nutrients to support overall health and recovery.

Looking for simple, healthy and delicious recipes to support a more active lifestyle? Get Active Victoria has a range that's sure to satisfy. Why not have a [browse](#) ?

The information provided is a guide. Remember that we are all different, and the type of physical activity we do will affect our personal energy and nutrient needs. For personalised advice see your health care provider.

Sources

Better Health Channel, Protein, State Government of Victoria, accessed 9 August 2024 (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/protein)

Sports Dietitians Australia, www.sportsdietitians.com.au

