

Pre-Game Meal

The primary purpose of the pre-game meal is to offset fatigue during the game.

There is no one-size-fits-all prescription because different people react differently to the same foods. Athletes should try to find food that won't cause GI distress and will help to maintain focus and endurance. A few guidelines:

- Eat low-glycemic foods, such as whole grain cereals, certain fruits, sandwiches made with whole wheat bread, etc., approximately two to three hours before a competition. The closer to your match, the smaller the meal. This will help sustain blood-sugar levels.
- Keep protein and fat intakes low because they slow digestion.
- Avoid bulky foods, like raw fruits and vegetables, dry beans, peas and popcorn, which can stimulate bowel movements.
- Avoid gas-forming foods such as vegetables from the cabbage family and cooked dry beans.
- Drink 400 to 600 mL (14 to 22 oz) of fluid two to three hours before exercise depending on tolerance (1).
- Do not try new foods just before a match. Eat foods familiar with your digestive system.
- Some athletes prefer to use their favorite foods, which may give them a psychological edge.

During the Game

Although eating as directed above will allow you to top off glycogen stores coming into the event, you still have to contend with two potential enemies – dehydration and rapid glycogen utilization and depletion.

Dehydration

When games drag out longer than expected, one can lose a great deal of sweat, and become dehydrated. A player's rate of fluid loss will depend on the environmental conditions, intensity of play, acclimatization, aerobic fitness, hydration status, age, and gender.

Glycogen Depletion

Glycogen depletion varies with the intensity of the game and aerobic fitness level. Although liquid carbohydrates can help restore lost glycogen, it is never replenished as fast as it is lost.

To remedy both problems, bring a water bottle containing a solution of six to seven percent carbohydrate and electrolytes, such as Cytomax, Heed, or Hammer Gel if your team does not already. The more a player plays, the more he may need to drink, therefore, do whenever possible.

Try to avoid Gatorade, Powerade or any of the common sport drinks seen on commercials because they contain a considerable amount of table sugar, which may lead to GI distress and poor replacement of muscle glycogen.

Still, something is better than nothing. It is important to consume carbohydrates in order to prevent performance decrease. For games longer than an hour, a carbohydrate-electrolyte drink, rather than water, is recommended.

If in doubt, try testing a drink during a practice game. If you feel good, go with it during competition.

Post- Game Meal

DO NOT FORGET the post-game meal!

Consume 1.5 g/kg bodyweight of CHO-rich, low fiber foods and beverages within 30 minutes or as soon as possible after a game and again every two hours for four to six hours to replace glycogen stores (1). This may be difficult when traveling, but failing to do so will encourage under-recovery and potential muscle wasting.

After physical activity lasting longer than an hour, the body best restores lost glycogen when carbohydrates and protein are consumed together in a ratio of 4:1 (6) or 3:1 (7,8), rather than simply consuming carbohydrates alone. Furthermore, the combination of CHO and protein has the added benefit of stimulating amino acid transport, protein synthesis and muscle tissue repair, all of which will further speed recovery and re-energize you for your next competition.

Products such as Endurox R4 by Endurox and Recoverite by Hammer Gel will provide both nutrients. When in a bind another option is drinking 20 oz. of low-fat chocolate milk post-exercise.

It is better to consume the “meal” as a liquid in order to facilitate recovery faster, and follow with a variety of whole-foods between two and four hours later.

Return to the normal Training Diet at the next meal.

Tournament Nutrition

The tournament schedule in basketball is difficult to accommodate nutritional strategies for recovery, flexibility and ingenuity. Not only must the athlete be committed to looking after fluid and CHO needs between matches, but he or she must also do so without a definite timetable. For a basketball player, one of the worst “injuries” is a cramp from eating too soon before a game.

As soon as a game schedule is known, plan a meal routine that schedules convenient pre-event meals and recovery strategies. When several games are played in succession over several days, pro-active recovery techniques will be important to maintaining

performance through the end of the schedule.

A lack of a nutritional plan can be a critical mistake. For away games, plan where you will be eating meals and try to organize the menus in advance. While on the road, take control of meals eaten on planes, buses and other travel options. Do not depend on others to have optimal nutrition choices available. Always carry some high-carbohydrate snacks or meal replacements, such as health bars, ready-to-drink shakes and fruit and yogurt for emergencies.