



Eating and Drinking for Fitness

Your body is your engine, and you can keep it running smoothly by fueling up your tank with healthy foods and your radiator with healthy fluids. What you put in your body (nutrition) is as important as what you do with your body (exercise). Both are crucial to keeping your engine performing at its best.

Before: Fuel Up!

Not fueling up before you work out is like driving a car on empty. You may not have enough energy to maximize your workout and you'll limit your ability to burn calories.

Ideally, fuel up two hours before you exercise:

- Hydrate with water. Drinking water before your workout is important to prevent dehydration.
- Eat healthy, easily digested carbohydrates such as fruits and vegetables, whole-grain cereals (with low-fat or skim milk), whole-wheat toast (with a little bit of almond or peanut butter), oatmeal, low-fat or fat-free yogurt, whole-grain pasta, or brown rice.
- Avoid saturated fats and protein — these digest slower in your stomach and take away oxygen and energy-delivering blood from your muscles.
- If you only have 5 or 10 minutes before you exercise, eat a piece of fruit such as an apple or banana.

During: Make a Pit Stop

- Whether you're a serious athlete who trains for hours or you have a low- to moderate-intensity workout routine, keep your body hydrated with small, frequent sips of water.
- You don't need to eat during a workout that's an hour or less. During longer, high-intensity, vigorous workouts, refuel every half hour or so with healthy carbohydrates such as a banana.

After: Refuel Your Tank

- **Fluids.** Drink plenty of water, of course. Instead of sugary sports drinks, try flavoring your water with 100% juice such as orange juice, which provides carbohydrates.
- **Carbohydrates.** You burn carbohydrates — the main fuel for your muscles — when you exercise. In the 20-60 minutes after your workout, your muscles can store carbohydrates as energy and help in recovery. Opt for fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- **Protein.** Protein can help repair and build muscle. Choose healthy protein foods such as fish, skinless chicken, lean meats, fat-free and low-fat milk and dairy products, beans, and vegetarian alternatives.

Staying Hydrated

Keeping the body hydrated helps the heart more easily pump blood through the blood vessels to the muscles. And, it helps the muscles work efficiently. If you're well-hydrated, your heart doesn't have to work as hard.

Dehydration can be a serious condition that can lead to problems ranging from swollen feet or a headache to life-threatening illnesses such as heat stroke.

How much water do you need?

- The amount of water a person needs depends on climate conditions, clothing, and exercise intensity and duration.
- A person who perspires heavily will need to drink more than someone who doesn't.
- Certain medical conditions, such as diabetes or heart disease, may also mean you need to drink more water. People with high concentrations of sodium in their sweat need to be careful to avoid dehydration. And some medications can act as diuretics, causing the body to lose more fluid.
- Thirst isn't the best indicator that you need to drink. If you get thirsty, you're already dehydrated. The easiest thing to do is pay attention to the color of your urine. Pale and clear means you're well-hydrated. If it's dark, drink more fluids.
- Not sweating during vigorous physical activity can be a red flag that you're dehydrated to the point of developing heat exhaustion.

For most people, water is the best thing to drink to stay hydrated. Sports drinks with electrolytes may be useful for people doing high intensity, vigorous exercise in very hot weather, but they tend to be high in added sugars and calories. Sugary drinks like soda can be hard on your stomach if you're dehydrated, and it's best to avoid drinks containing caffeine, which acts as a diuretic and causes you to lose more fluids.

Many fruits and vegetables also contain a high percentage of water, making them an ideal pre- or post-workout snack!

The American Heart Association has many great resources to help you eat healthy, including hundreds of free recipes. Find them at [heart.org/nutrition](https://www.heart.org/nutrition).