

In the Nutrition Lane

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Eating to Win: Meet Day and Before

Figuring out what and when to eat on meet days can be tough. You don't want to feel physically hungry during a meet, which indicates low energy reserves. Don't, however, make the mistake of over-fueling. Most swim events are relatively short. Even the 1650 is completed well under the 60 minutes usually considered the minimum competition time for which carbohydrate loading might be beneficial. The challenge for swimmers, of course, is that there are usually multiple events on a given day, often finals at the end of the day, and consecutive days of competition. What this means to you is the need for small, frequent meals (snacks) squeezed in-between swims.

Foods eaten immediately before and during a meet should be easily and relatively quickly digested. That suggests avoiding foods with much fat or fiber, both of which slow down digestion (through different mechanisms). A little common sense goes a long way here: We all know how energetic we feel after a serving of fries or other fatty foods. Another poor choice prior to competition is any carbonated beverage.

Do include sources of complex carbohydrate (starch), and adequate fluids. You may find that you feel and perform better with a carbohydrate snack that also provides some protein, such as in some commercial snack bars. You can also add protein by including lean meat, fish, or poultry to bread or a bagel. Below is a list of suggested snacks for swim meet days.

- Fresh fruit: oranges, grapes, apples, bananas, peaches, etc.
- Canned fruit (in juice, not syrup)
- Bagels
- Raisins
- Unsweetened applesauce
- Snack bars (look for higher protein, lower sugar)
- Trail mix
- Some dry cereals, such as *Wheat Chex*, *Frosted Mini-Wheats*, granola
- Homemade whole-grain muffins or low-sugar bars
- Pretzels
- Bagels
- Water (or sport drink)



- Your most important snack*

*Be sure to drink plenty of liquids the week before, the day before, the morning of, and between events.

A dedicated athlete pays attention to diet consistently, not just the day or week of an important meet. That doesn't mean there is never room for junk foods and empty calories, but it does mean regularly obtaining wholesome foods that supply essential nutrients in a balance that allows the body to perform at its best.

