



GUIDELINES FOR EATING BEFORE MORNING EXERCISE

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Maybe you've heard that it's really important to eat before morning exercise? Perhaps you've tried it, but you had limited time and really regretted it during your workout because you just felt heavy, slightly nauseas and had tummy issues? Don't fret, you are not alone, this is a common scenario and a major reason that many people do their workouts in a fasted state. Today I'm going to explain why it is so important to eat before you exercise in the morning and give you tips on WHAT to choose when time is not on your side.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH EXERCISING IF I HAVEN'T EATEN YET?

Food, particularly carbohydrates, is fuel for your body. We all know how far a car goes when it runs out of fuel... Not very far at all. While we fortunately have carbohydrate stores (in the form of glycogen) in our muscles, these stores are limited, even more so if you have not eaten for 10-12 hours since your dinner the night before. You can therefore imagine the effects that going to train fasted would have^{1,2,3}:

- Premature fatigue
- Low blood sugar levels
- Decreased endurance capacity
- Decreased speed
- Gastrointestinal upsets
- Negative effects on body composition

Simply put to get the most out of your training and to be able to go for longer it is a good idea to consume something before you train.

THE IN'S AND OUT'S OF TIMING

Your pre-exercise meal should be eaten in a period of 1-4 hours before training. Now, obviously if you are training at 5.30am, eating at 2am is really not an option for most recreational athletes. You may be willing to make some sacrifices before a competition or race, but certainly not a few times a week. Eating 1 hour before may be more realistic, but brings its own limitations; most people really can't stomach much so soon before.



GUIDELINES ON WHAT TO CHOOSE WHEN TIME IS LIMITED

If you have a good few hours before start of your exercise options of carbohydrate rich breakfasts that will fuel you well are broad. However, when you have an hour or even less before exercise your options become quite limited. Nevertheless, you should ideally get something in, here are some tips that I've picked up over time:

Go low residue

Contrary to the types of carbohydrates one should generally try to include in their diet, in this meal you want to try steer away from high fibre foods. Low fibre foods are digested more quickly and will help to prevent gastrointestinal upsets and leave you feeling lighter during exercise⁴.

Portion with caution

You are most likely not going to be able to stomach a large serving of anything so soon before exercise. My feeling here is something is better than nothing, even if you can only tolerate a few mouthfuls of a carbohydrate rich food, it is more fuel than you would have had if you had foregone the meal.

Fat phobia

Like fibre, while (good) fats play an important role in our diets, they should be kept to a minimum before exercise. The reason for this is that fat slows down absorption of food and will leave you feeling heavy and uncomfortable. As a side note, if you include dairy remember to go low-fat or fat-free.

Drink your pre-exercise meal

This is a dual-purpose guideline. Firstly, this will help you to get in some fluids and assist with hydration levels. Secondly, many people find a liquid meal easier to stomach in the morning, it is also often more convenient to drink a meal on-the-go rather than sitting down to eat.

Personalise to your own tolerance

What works for one person may not work for the next, try different food options until you learn what works best for you. A small period of trial for a lifetime of brilliant morning workouts.

EXAMPLES FOOD OPTIONS THAT MAY WORK FOR YOU

Now that we know the rules, here are some examples of foods that fit the criteria. Remember to keep portions small.

- Ripe banana and yoghurt (low fat/ fat free)



- Jam or honey on toast or rice cakes
- FUTURELIFE® High Energy Smart food™ smoothie, see <http://futurelife.co.za/futurelife-high-energy-smart-food-strawberry-star/>, keep the leftovers for after your workout.
- Low fibre muffin or crumpets with honey
- FUTURELIFE® High Energy SmartBar
- Coffee and a rusk
- Sports drink

I hope that this information will help you to go from strength to strength in your training and that you achieve all your goals in whatever sport makes you smile.

REFERENCES

1. [https://www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health/Nutrition-A-Z/Sports-Nutrition-\(Adult\)/Fuelling-up-before-exercise.aspx](https://www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health/Nutrition-A-Z/Sports-Nutrition-(Adult)/Fuelling-up-before-exercise.aspx)
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