

Basic Nutrition Guidelines

by Mary Kelley, Head Coach for [AIM4TRI](#) and [Team Lemon](#)

Everyday Nutrition:

In my opinion, 90% of sports nutrition should look a lot like basic good nutrition. In our daily lives, we as athletes should choose lean protein sources, plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy sources, and a moderate amount of whole grains, all with as little processing, saturated fat and high-fructose corn syrup as possible. Sweets and heavily-processed foods may be consumed in moderation. Fats should come from healthy sources like fish, nuts & vegetable / fruit sources (i.e. avocados).

As for amounts, it's tough to say how much we each need. There are various online calculators that estimate your caloric needs using basic formulas, but some of us have faster metabolisms, and some slower, so they're really just estimates. It's best to listen to your own hunger, or see a Registered Dietician if you're unsure. If you're new to endurance training, your caloric needs will increase. Ensure that you are eating enough to fuel your sport, but don't overestimate your caloric needs. Jogging an easy 3 miles does not entitle you to a double cheeseburger and large milkshake afterwards.

High-quality food will fuel your body better than junk food, so it may help you think about **food as fuel**, not as a reward or punishment!

The nutrition needs of an endurance athlete vary from a non-athlete when it comes to pre-, during and post-workout / race needs.

Before a Workout / Race:

It is critical to practice your pre-race nutrition during practice, to see how your body tolerates various types and amounts of food. Think about pre-race nutrition as everything you eat and drink from the week prior, through dinner the night before, up until the race begins.

Taper week: Be careful not to over-consume this week. As your training volume drops, so should the volume of food you eat. I like to remind myself that most of what I consume that week, I will have to "carry" through the race. That helps me to make good nutrition and portion choices. Hydration is also key in the days leading up to an event. Don't overdo it, but be sure that you are drinking enough that you have clear or light yellow urine.

Avoid too many high-fiber foods in the 24-36 hours before your event.

Dinner the night before: Resist the urge to "carbo load" the night before an event. This will only weigh you down and slow your digestion. Instead, eat something light, simple and balanced. My favorite meal: plain grilled chicken or fish, small serve of pasta, small sweet (or baked) potato & green peas.

Race morning: Eat something light and easily digestible that you have practiced eating before. I avoid high-fiber foods, citrus & dairy, and choose toast with honey, or a bagel with a light smear of peanut butter. If you drink coffee every morning, have your regular amount. Also, take in some liquids (mainly water and sports drink), but don't overdo it, unless you want to stop at the port-a-potties throughout the race!

During a Workout / Race:

If your race will take you longer than an hour to complete, you should consume some easily-digestible calories during the event. You will have to play around with the ideal types and amounts for yourself during training, and especially very intense and/or longer training sessions that simulate your race effort.

A rough guideline is:

~0.6g of carbs per kg/bw per hour (optional protein and caffeine)

Example: If I weigh 130 lbs, that's 59 kg, so $59 \times 0.6 = 35.4$ grams of carbs every hour. This equates to approximately one gel and a few ounces of sports drink every hour. If you weigh 200 lbs, that's 91 kg, so $91 \times 0.6 = 54.6$ grams of carbs every hour. This equates to approximately 1 gel and a few ounces of sports drink every 45 minutes.

For events lasting longer than 4 hours, I like to include some solid food instead of all gels and sports drink, like Clif Bars and/or Fig Newtons.

Speaking of hydration, I go by thirst, and drink a combination of water and sports drink (separate bottles for each) as I feel thirsty.

Tip: Find out what kind of nutrition is offered on the race course, and at what intervals. Practice with that exact sports drink and gel. If you can tolerate it well, you can mainly rely on the water stops at the race, but always have a back-up plan (i.e. stash a few emergency rations for yourself in case they run out).

Types: Sports Drink, Gel/Gu, Gummies, Jelly Beans, Electrolyte tablets/drops, bars, dried fruit, homemade oatmeal & peanut butter smoothie, Fig Newtons, etc.

After a Workout / Race:

It is best to eat something within 30 minutes of completing exercise and/or a race, preferably with a 4:1 carbs to protein ratio. This will fuel those depleted muscles and kick-start the recovery process. It may also help to boost metabolism.

Ideas:

Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich

Yogurt & Nuts

Fruit & Nuts

Pizza (Watch the fat content of cheese)

Berry smoothie with protein powder

Low-fat Chocolate Milk (My personal favorite)

Hydration:

How much water should you drink?

Take your body weight in pounds, divide by 2, and that's the number of fluid ounces you should consume during the day (excluding additional amounts required during exercise).

$$\text{Weight (lbs)} / 2 = \text{Fl. Oz}$$

For example, I weigh roughly 130 pounds, so I aim to finish one Nalgene bottle (32 oz) before lunch, and another one before dinner, for 64 ounces total, plus extra water or sports drink during workouts. If you weigh 200 pounds, you would want to finish ~three Nalgene bottles each day.

If it all seems like a complicated puzzle, and you don't know where to start, think about meeting with a [Registered Dietician](#). I can recommend a fantastic group that specializes in Sports Nutrition, Weight Loss and Eating Disorders. They are located in King of Prussia, PA, and offer phone consultations for those outside of the area.