Nutrition for Cyclists

Eating the right combination of carbohydrates and protein can help you become a stronger and faster cyclist, and help your muscles recover quicker from each exercise session. What will suit you best depends very much on your level of training, your personal tastes and your digestive tolerances, although recommendations from other cyclists can be helpful too.

➢ **Before**
Starting out with sufficient energy reserves is vital, but it's best to allow one to four hours after eating a proper meal before setting off, otherwise your body may not have had time to digest the food properly.

If it's been a while since you last ate and you're already peckish, or you're heading out first thing, think about grabbing a quick snack like a banana or energy bar, perhaps a slice of toast or half a bagel. Alternatively, a few swigs of a sports drink can give you a quick boost - these are easier to digest than solid food, and are a good source of carbohydrate if you can't stomach anything more substantial.

Keeping hydrated while training is also an absolute must. As a rough guide, try to drink 500ml of water, diluted juice or a sport drink two hours before a ride, and another 150ml just before you leave.

➢ **During**
If you plan to ride for less than an hour, plain water should be all you need to top up your fluid levels while you're out. Exercise for longer, though, and you may find sports drinks helpful. These usually contain sugar, maltodextrin and electrolytes including sodium - the exact constitution will vary between manufacturers. Experiment with several varieties to see what suits you best, and which flavours you prefer.

For long rides (over 60 minutes), consider taking a snack with you so you're not left running on empty. Energy gels washed down with water will give you an added boost, as will jelly beans or a banana.

➢ **After**
Replacing fluid after a ride is just as important as before and during. Drinking around 500ml of water or diluted juice in the first 30 minutes after your ride should be plenty, but if you have a headache or feel nauseous you should have more.

After hard sessions, especially if you plan to train again the next day, think about having a recovery drink. The carbohydrate-protein ration of these drinks will speed up muscle repair, rehydrate you quickly and also give your immune system a boost.

Energy bars are also good for topping up your fuel reserves when you get back. Like recovery drinks, they contain a mixture of carbohydrate and protein that will help your muscles recover faster. Other good post-ride snacks include eggs on toast, a fruit smoothie and a tuna sandwich. If you can, try to eat within half an hour of completing your ride, as this will maximise the benefits.

1. **Eating and Training: How to time it right**
   **By Liz Applegate (Runners World)**

Many cyclists know exactly what they should eat and when they should eat it. It's the practical application of this theory that messes them up. You are either ravenous when you don't want to be - during training - or not hungry when you should be - immediately after training. The problem is that when you are planning your ride around a busy work schedule, your brain, leg muscles and stomach don't always stay in sync. An early-morning ride, for example, can leave you feeling fatigued during your working day. A midday training session may become no more than an afterthought if hunger overrides your motivation. And an after-work jaunt may press your dinnertime perilously close to bedtime.

If you are looking for ways to get back into sync, read on. The following advice will help you coordinate your meals with your training schedule, based on the time of day you cycle.

**Early Birds**

To eat or not to eat? That is the eternal question of those who like to ride as the sun is coming up.
The answer is, if you can, you should fuel up before your morning ride. This performs two functions. First your muscles receive an energy supply to help you power through the ride. Secondly, your entire body, especially your brain, receives the fuel and nutrients it needs for optimal functioning. It shouldn’t be a surprise that studies support this and that eating before a ride boosts endurance compared with fasting for 12 hours. People who eat before exercise rate the exercise as better and as less rigorous compared with those who fast. Here are a few refuelling strategies for both types of morning exercisers:

- **Early risers**
  Choose high-carbohydrate foods that are low in fat and moderate in protein. Aim for about 400-800 calories, which will fuel your training without making you feel sluggish. Drink about half a pint of water two hours before your ride to offset sweat loss.

Try these 400 – 800 calorie pre-ride breakfasts:

- Two slices of toast and a piece of fruit
- Cereal with skimmed or semi-skimmed milk and fresh fruit
- A toasted bagel topped with low-fat cheese and tomato slices

- **Late sleepers**
  Most cyclists fall into this category and don’t have time to eat and digest a full meal before they head out of the door. If you fall in to this camp, experiment to see what you can stomach before you train. Here are a few suggestions:

- Half a pint of a carbohydrate drink
- An energy gel washed down with water
- Half a bagel

A high-carbohydrate evening meal should power you through your pre-breakfast ride.

- **For both types**
  Whether you are an early or late rise, your body needs calories from carbohydrate, protein and other nutrients after you have finished riding. A recovery meal will help fuel your morning at work, preventing post-ride fatigue. Eat with in an hour of your training and be sure to include both carbohydrate and protein. Here are some options:

- A fruit smoothie made with a tablespoon of protein powder
- Eggs on whole wheat toast and fruit juice or fresh fruit
- Leftovers from dinner – pasta, soup, chilli or even vegetable pizza

### The Lunchtime Crowd

People who cycle during lunch hours sometimes find that hunger gets the better of them. By noon, your fuel from breakfast is long gone and your blood sugar may start to dip. Rather than increasing the size of your breakfast (which may just leave you feeling sluggish), you should bring a light, pre-ride snack to work.

Remember the following three points as your ride:

- **Timing:** eat one to four hours before you ride to allow enough time for the food to leave your stomach
- **Quantity:** eat 100 – 400 calories, depending upon your body size and what you had for breakfast
- **Content:** select foods that are rich in carbohydrate, low in fat and moderately high in nutrients.

Try these mid-morning snacks:

- A breakfast or energy bar with five grams of fat or less
- One slice of whole wheat toast topped with fruit spread
- A 75g serving of dried fruit with a can of vegetable juice
- One packet of instant oatmeal made with skimmed milk

- **Post lunch cycle**
  The obvious problem with lunch hour exercise is that you don’t have time for lunch. But you need fluid and food to recover and fuel your brain for the rest of the working day. Packing your own lunch becomes a must, unless you have a work cafeterias where you can grab food for desktop dining. Packed lunches don’t have to take a lot of time. Try these tips:
• Opt for convenience and shop for lunch items that save time, such as yoghurts, raisins, nuts and cereal bars
• Always add fruit. Toss one or two pieces of fruit in your lunch bag for a reliable source of nutrient-packed carbohydrate
• Make the most of leftovers. Choose any food from the previous night’s dinner that you’ve already packed in a sealed container ready for transport, reheating and eating

Evening Exercise

After a stressful day at the office, there’s nothing like a cycle ride to burn off excess tension. The problem is that you sometimes don’t feel like heading out of the door if you’re hungry or just exhausted. If you do manage to ride, sometimes you return home so ravenous that you eat everything in sight as you make your evening meal. Then you might eat dinner as late as 8pm and end up going to bed on a full stomach.

What to do?
It’s very simple, just stick to the following two principles:

1. Eat healthily during the day to avoid any intestinal upset that might thwart your training plans. Also eat often and enough that you’re adequately fuelled for your session to avoid the ‘I’m too hungry’ excuse
2. Eat lightly after exercise to recover well without causing digestion to interfere with your sleep

Here are some tips for evening exercisers:

• Never skip breakfast. Eat at least 500 calories for your morning meal. For example, quickly throw together a fruit smoothie made with yogurt, fruit and juice. Or try cereal topped with nuts, skimmed milk and a piece of fruit
• Make lunch your main meal of the day. Focus on high-quality protein, such as fish, tofu, lean beef, chicken or bread with cooked grain, along with fresh fruit
• Always eat a mid-afternoon snack. Around three hours before your ride, eat a snack of fruit or an energy bar together with half a pint of water
• Drink more fluids. Grab a drink as soon as your step back through the door after your ride and keep drinking as you prepare your meal. This helps replace sweat loss and may prevent you trying to eat everything in sight
• Eat moderately at dinner. Some people worry about eating too close to bedtime because they fear the calories will go straight to their fat cells, that simply is not true. Your body will use those calories to stockpile fuel in your muscles. On the other hand if you eat more calories than your body needs, no matter what time of day or night, your body will eventually store the excess as fat

2. Amazing Grace
   By Beth Moxey Eck (Runners World)

Nutrition experts now believe that grazing on five smaller meals through the day is better than eating three big ones. Why should this be? It’s mainly because a steady food intake keeps your energy levels consistently higher. Also, when you graze, you never become overly hungry, so you don’t get the urge to overeat. This makes weight control easier. You also tend to chose higher-quality foods if you never let yourself become too hungry.

But which snacks are best?

- **Bananas**
  - **Why they’re good**: full of carbohydrates, also a good source of vitamin B6 which is vital for managing protein metabolism
  - **When they’re good**: before, during or after exercise. They’re great blended in to a fruit smoothie. Or simply whip frozen banana chunks with milk in a blender for a delicious recovery shake
  - **Calories**: 105kcal per medium sized banana

- **Carrots**
  - **Why they’re good**: carrots are low in calories, but filling. This makes them excellent if you’re watching your weight. They contain carotene and vitamin A, which promote eye health and a strong immune system
When they’re good: Eat them at night when you want something to munch but don’t want extra calories. Or eat them before dinner if you’re famished. This way, you won’t over indulge once you sit down for your meal

Calories: 30-40kcal per medium sized carrot

- **Cereal Bars**
  Why they’re good: A low calorie cereal bar will satisfy your sweet cravings, without the fat calories of a chocolate bar, and unlike chocolate bars they also come with B vitamins and iron

  When they’re good: Whenever you feel like satisfying your sweet tooth, without feeling guilty

  Calories: From about 110kcal per 30g bar

- **Cereal with skimmed milk**
  Why it’s good: Most cereals are vitamin and mineral fortified, and they’re great with fresh fruit sliced on top. Cereal is a quick to prepare, easily digestible and healthy way to satisfy your sweet tooth. Choose cereals that have 5g of fibre of more per serving

  When it’s good: Fine as a pre-ride snack, a post ride pick me up or even as a trail mix during a long, easy ride

  Calories: Between 200 – 500kcal (per 45g of cereal with 250ml of skimmed milk)

- **Chocolate milk**
  Why it’s good: Chocolate milk is cold and helps keep you hydrated. It also provides plenty of protein, carbohydrates and B vitamins. The calcium in milk will help keep your bones strong

  When it’s good: An ice-cold shot of chocolate milk is the perfect reward after a hot summer ride

  Calories: 160kcal per 250ml of semi-skimmed chocolate milk

- **Cottage Cheese**
  Why it’s good: It’s packed with protein, which cyclists need in larger amounts than sedentary people, for muscle rebuilding and repair. It serves as a good calcium source as well

  When it’s good: Any time except just before cycling. Great with fruit after an intense training session or race

  Calories: 72kcal per 100g of low fat cottage cheese

- **Dried Apricots**
  Why they’re good: These chewy little morsels are low in fat and high in carbohydrates and provide a decent amount of vitamin A, fibre and potassium

  When they’re good: At any time, toss chopped apricots over your cereal at breakfast, or eat whole ones plain before you afternoon training session or as a sweet treat after dinner.

  Calories: Around 80kcal per 10 dried apricot halves

- **Prunes**
  Why they’re good: Prunes contain no fat are packed with carbohydrates. They’re also a good source of fibre and potassium. Eating potassium rich foods such as prunes helps lower high blood pressure

  When they’re good: Prunes make a healthy snack almost any time, however don’t eat them before a ride as they can act as a laxative

  Calories: About 100kcal per 5 prunes

- **Energy Bars**
  Why they’re good: Designed especially for athletes, you can choose from high carb bars, protein recovery bars, or ones that contain a mixture of carbs, protein and even vitamins. They’re tasty and come in all kinds of flavours
When they’re good: post-exercise. Liquid energy is better during or just before exercise

Calories: 200 – 300kcal per 75g bar

- **Fig Rolls**
  Why they’re good: chewy figs rolls are a tasty and convenient source of carbohydrates and fibre. They are carbs that are quickly digestible, making them a great on-the-run snack
  
  When they’re good: any time, even during the middle of a marathon when you need to refuel in a hurry. Of course, if you’re prone to ‘cyclist’s trots’ save them till after the race
  
  Calories: 110kcal per 2 fig rolls

- **Fruit ice-lollies**
  Why they’re good: this refreshing, low calorie treat is loaded with vit C, which fortifies your immune system and helps boost iron absorption. Best to choose real fruit juice lollies rather than the artificial versions
  
  When they’re good: they’re great any time, but best straight after a tough, hot ride
  
  Calories: 75kcal per lolly

- **Fruit yoghurt**
  Why it’s good: yoghurt is a great source of calcium, protein and potassium and it’s low in fat and fairly high in carbs. The live and active cultures added to certain types will also boost your immune system
  
  When it’s good: any time
  
  Calories: 250kcal per 200g of low-fat yoghurt

- **Green soya beans**
  Why they’re good: soya beans in any form are a high quality source of protein, iron, B vitamins and heart healthy isoflavones. Soy protein has been shown to lower risk of heart disease and cancer
  
  When they’re good: eat them after a ride, or as a low calorie, but filling, afternoon snack
  
  Calories: 147kcal per 100g raw or boiled

- **Home-made pizza**
  Why it’s good: fresh tomatoes, peppers, sliced onion and mushrooms piled on a ready made pizza base and lightly sprinkled with low fat mozzarella or feta cheese. A slice of pizza supplies energy from the carb-rich base, protein and calcium from the cheese and a range of vitamins from the vegetables
  
  When it’s good: eat a slice after cycling or as an afternoon snack to keep you energised for your evening meal
  
  Calories: 250kcal per slice (100g)

- **Hummus on pitta bread**
  Why it’s good: split the pitta bread and toast until crisp. Break into pieces and use as a substitute for crisps. This filling snack packs plenty of protein, fibre, vit B6 and folic acid. Opt for low-fat hummus
  
  When it’s good: hummus works well as a substantial mid-morning or afternoon snack. It’s also a healthier alternative to peanuts or other fried party snacks
  
  Calories: 280kcal per 3 tablespoons of hummus and one pitta

- **Individual cheeses**
  Why they’re good: individually wrapped cheeses are available at most supermarkets, and make a tasty, convenient way to take in calcium, protein as well as a little fat. Don’t go overboard though as most full-fat cheeses are at least 25% fat
When they’re good: have a cheese or two with some high carb foods after a long ride. Research shows that eating a little protein along with carbs can speed your recovery.

**Calories**: 80kcal per cheese

- **Kiwi fruit**
  - **Why they’re good**: one kiwi provides more vit C than an average adult needs in a day, helping to fight off infections, colds and flu. Kiwis contain some potassium too which can help to lower blood cholesterol levels.
  - **When they’re good**: anytime
  - **Calories**: 29kcal each

- **Popcorn**
  - **Why it’s good**: popcorn is low in fat, comprising mainly of carbohydrates – just ensure you avoid the buttered and toffee-coated varieties.
  - **When it’s good**: after a long hard ride
  - **Calories**: 55kcal per cup of plain popcorn

- **Porridge**
  - **Why it’s good**: studies show that a bowl of porridge helps lower cholesterol. Porridge will also fill you with plenty of carbs to boost energy and alertness.
  - **When it’s good**: an excellent meal before a race or whenever you wake up feeling hungry and ready for a hearty breakfast.
  - **Calories**: 250kcal per bowl made from 45g dried oats and semi-skimmed milk

- **Rice cakes with peanut butter**
  - **Why they’re good**: rice cakes are low in calories, most of which come from energising carbohydrates. Peanut butter in an excellent source of protein and heart-healthy polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fat. It also contains vit E, which helps with muscle recovery.
  - **When they’re good**: a perfect filling snack for mid-morning or mid-afternoon snack.
  - **Calories**: 125kcal for one rice cake with one dessertspoon of peanut butter

- **Smoothies**
  - **Why they’re good**: if you use fruit juice and skimmed milk, smoothies are an easy way to consume a healthy dose of calcium, potassium and vitamins C and A.
  - **When they’re good**: a cooling summer treat, good for breakfast, before a ride, or as a refreshing, re-energising, post-ride treat.
  - **Calories**: roughly 200kcal per 350ml.

😊 HAPPY TRAINING 😊