

BE INSPIRED BY THE OLYMPICS

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Top tips on how to eat well and get more active

Whether you are a keen sportsperson or an armchair athlete, this year's London Olympic Games will be a great source of inspiration if you're looking to try your hand at a new sport or go back to one you've given up in the past. Sitting in front of the TV (or at the Games if you have been lucky enough to get tickets) you can't help but marvel at and be inspired by the energy and athleticism of the Olympic athletes, whatever their sport.

What an athlete eats is just as important as all the hours of training so the Flour Advisory Bureau (www.fabflour.co.uk) has got together with Sports Dietitian and Nutrition Consultant Jane Griffin¹ to share some of the healthy eating tips from top athletes*. Find out what Olympians in sports ranging from sailing to walking to running to swimming eat on a typical day and be inspired to adapt your daily diet.

"While you sit watching the Olympics, think about what those athletes have put into their bodies and think what you put into yours. Use the Olympics to make some simple changes – try to exercise more and eat more healthily – but don't lose the enjoyment factor. What better place to start than while sitting watching the Olympics? Swap the high fat, high salt nibbles – you don't need them if you are just sitting in a chair. Instead prepare healthy TV snacks and mini-meals** such as •Thai prawn cocktail sandwich or Seeded Carrot Flapjacks or a slightly more substantial meal such as Halfway" pizza that you can produce quickly at a meal times. Buy in plenty of white and brown sliced bread, low fat spread and low fat soft cheese to spread on the bread and then have a supply of suitable fillings ready in the fridge and kitchen.

Healthy ideas for fillings include protein- based foods such as sliced, cooked meats, smoked salmon, canned tuna or mackerel, hard boiled eggs chopped and mixed with salad cream or low fat mayonnaise, peanut butter and jam. Remember, these are the sorts of foods the Olympic athletes have been training on!" explains Jane.

The right fuels for top performance:

Jane continues, "It is a bit of a myth that an athlete burns off so much energy it doesn't matter what they eat. In fact their bodies can be likened to high performance cars:

- Right fuel for a particular sport (petrol) food especially carbohydrate-rich foods
- Keep well-hydrated (water) fluids
- Keep healthy (shiny bodywork) vitamins, minerals, essential fatty acids etc
- Supplements (spoiler, fancy hub caps, personalised number plate) – necessary? Some may be but not all

The most important nutrient for sporting performance is carbohydrate – the primary fuel for muscle contraction as much for the endurance athlete as for the athlete competing on strength and speed or a

member of a team sport. Sadly the body can only store a limited amount of carbohydrate and athletes therefore need to ensure their diet contains enough carbohydrate to meet their daily needs and that the refuelling process begins as soon as possible after training/competition finishes.

If an athlete does not eat/drink enough carbohydrate they suffer fatigue, put in poor performances and put themselves at greater risk of picking up an injury – neither thing they want to happen – particularly at or just before the Olympics.”

Why do sportspeople eat bread?

“Like many sports nutritionists I make sure that the athletes I’m involved with eat enough carbohydrate to perform well. Overall bread is pretty well an essential in an athlete’s diet – convenient, ready to eat (no cooking unless you call popping a slice in the toaster or under the grill cooking!), plenty of variety (reducing the boredom factor somewhat) but not just of the type of bread but what can be done with i.e. sandwiches, filled pittas, toast etc” advises Jane.

The four main reasons why bread is an excellent training aid:

1. Nutritional value – Bread is an excellent source of carbohydrate which is precisely the fuel that athletes from all sports need and regardless of whether they are Olympic athletes or members of the general public training to run their first marathon or fun-run, play football at the weekend or play tennis, squash or badminton – just for fun, fitness and the social side of amateur sport. But bread has many other nutritional attributes – a good source of many of the B complex vitamins; and if it is of the wholegrain variety plenty of fibre too. White bread is a good source of calcium too. Nutritionally bread provides not just vital carbohydrate but many other important nutrients that help to keep the sporting body fit and healthy.
2. Easy, effective refuelling – athletes need to refuel as soon as possible after training or competition and the primary requirement is for carbohydrate. Restocking the stores of muscle glycogen (name for stored carbohydrate) after training or competition is greatest in the first hour after exercise. Fluids obviously play a part but sports dietitians and sports nutritionists will encourage food intake as well and bread figures strongly on the list of refuellers they will be suggesting to their athletes.
3. Convenience – life is hectic and most athletes do not want to spend a lot of time shopping and cooking. They want to train and rest but recognise the importance of the correct diet (and fluid intake) and so bread does figure strongly in most sportsmen and sportswomen’s diets as these examples show.
4. Variety – Sports dietitians and sports nutritionists will recommend all types of bread. As well as white, brown and wholemeal bread, Olympic athletes could be including bagels, English muffins, crumpets, pikelets, naans, chapattis, potato cakes, raisin bread, malt loaf, fruit loaf, rye bread, tea breads, pancakes, Scotch pancakes, tortillas and wraps and soft pretzels: the choice is endless.

Eating well for sport on a budget:

Being healthy needn't cost a fortune and the good news is that choosing a healthy diet doesn't have to be more expensive. With a little nutritional know how, careful planning and shopping, you can eat healthily without spending a fortune.

Jane explains, "If you're on a budget you'll be pleased to hear that many of the foods that nutritionists like me recommend for a healthy balanced diet, like beans and pulses and starchy carbohydrates like bread, pasta and rice, are excellent value for money as well as being nutritious.

You can easily freeze bread so you can always make yourself a variety of meals whatever time you finish training – and the huge range of breads available mean you'll never get bored. A good source of carbohydrate, calcium, iron, and B vitamin, bread is also a cost effective way of filling up."

Three top tips to help you eat well whatever level of sport you enjoy:

1. Moderation is the word! Emphasis is on moderate to high carbohydrate, moderate protein as low in fat as possible without losing flavour and acceptability

2. Be fat aware and follow the general healthy eating message of a low fat content diet by using:

- a. Semi-skimmed or skimmed milk
- b. Polyunsaturated margarine, butter or low fat spread
- c. No cream – use low fat yogurt instead
- d. Use sunflower oil, olive oil etc but use as little as possible
- e. Obviously no deep-fried food
- f. Use lean meats etc and remove any visible fat
- g. Keep sauces low fat (no creamy sauces) – make use of low fat yogurt and also keep gravies low in fat too
- h. Chicken, turkey and fish are all good choices but again no skin
- i. No creamy sauces
- j. Use low fat cheeses or less of a strong cheese
- k. Dressings – low fat/oil free perhaps based on yogurt if appropriate?
- l. Desserts – fruit, yogurt, low fat ice-cream, sorbets, ice lollies. Smoothies are popular too!
Try making with Oatly oat drink for a cholesterol lowering boost too.
- m. Athletes with bigger appetites will enjoy simple, low fat puddings like sponge and custard, crumbles, pancakes with fruit sauces etc

3. Keep your carbohydrate levels up – it's the main source of energy for athletes.

- o Include plenty of bread, as much variety as you like but just avoid croissants, pain au chocolate and other pastry-type items
- o Potatoes should be kept fairly plain i.e. boiled, mashed and jacket potatoes rather than roast, chips or "dishes"
- o Use rice, pasta and noodles
- o Breakfast cereals and pulses are great ways to boost carbohydrate intake
- o Pulses such as red kidney beans, chickpeas, borlotti and cannellini beans help to boost carbohydrate

intake

- o Salads based around pasta, rice or beans
- o Fruit based dishes – especially bananas, a fruit loved by most athletes
- o Use honey, jam or marmalade
- o Malt loaf, teacakes, hot cross buns, fruit scones, banana bread and similar 'low fat' items are popular among the high energy demanding sports

Activity legacy:

One of the many legacies of the Olympics will, it is hoped, be the inspiration left by the competing athletes for the rest of the population to be inspired to become more physically active. Perhaps this will mean taking up a new sport, reviving a sport once played and enjoyed some years ago or signing up for a fun run, 10k, half marathon or marathon – be it walking, jogging or running it!

* So what do athletic athletes eat to fuel their training programme?

A female swimmer whose event is 200m breast stroke, trains 5 hours a day, 5 days a week. Sessions are split into two with a 2 hour swim and 1 hour cardio/weights session in the morning and another 2 hour swim in the afternoon. At the weekend she trains for 3 hours in the pool on Saturday morning. Sunday is her rest day! She eats up to 4 pieces/slices of bread a day as part of her diet.

A female GB marathon runner puts in 2-4 hours training a day, 7 days a week. This usually means she does an early morning run and then another run later on in the day – so allowing recovery time in between. She does a mixture of easy running, track sessions and threshold sessions. Her diet is heavily weighted towards carbohydrate-rich foods as this is the primary source of fuel for her training. She therefore eats bread based foods 2-3 times a day including bread, bagels, crumpets or hot cross buns.

Another potential Olympic female runner, whose event is 800m trains 6 days a week, starting with a run at 7.00am, followed by rest and then a further session at 3.00pm which can be another run, a strength and conditioning session in the gym working with weights and a track session. Sometimes she might join in with other athletes in an evening training session at the track.

Her typical food intake is:-

Pre-run – sports drink

Breakfast (which also serves as a recovery meal after her first training session) – 2 or 3 bagels or toast with low fat spread. Sometimes she will include an egg – poached, boiled or scrambled

Snacks throughout the day – fruit and nuts

Lunch – pasta dish (or whatever is on offer in the refectory at her training ground), extra bread roll, yogurt, fruit salad and occasionally cake (simple sort, not a cream cake!).

Before afternoon training - sips of sports drink and a banana

Post-training – more sports drink and another banana

Evening meal – jacket potato with filling, salad and fruit

Her average energy intake is between 2,000-2,700kcal a day

Another female swimmer 50m/100m/200m/medley: trains 5½ days a week. Her typical day looks like this:

First thing before early morning training – sports drink or toast, jam and tea

Post-swim training – Breakfast – cereal, semi-skimmed milk, fruit, carton yogurt, bread roll, fruit juice

Lunch – baguette filled with lean meat/chicken and salad; cake, cereal bars or malt loaf; squash or water

Rest

Pre-afternoon swim session – squash/sports drink/banana/milkshake (any of these – depends on how she feels and what the session is going to be like)

Post-training – 2 hot cross buns

Evening meal – beef stir-fry and rice, yogurt and fruit

Late snack – few plain biscuits

Average intake 3000kcal a day

A male athlete - a 20km race walker who is hoping to qualify for the London Olympics, trains 6 days a week, twice a day:

8.30 Breakfast - Orange juice (200ml), Porridge (50g) with semi-skimmed milk (250ml) and mixed dried fruit (50g), Coffee (200ml)

11.00am - 500ml water, medium banana, cereal bar

12.00 - 100g Frosties, Semi-skimmed milk

4.00pm - 2 slices of white bread with peanut butter, 3 Jaffa cakes, Pear, Coffee

7.30pm - Cereal bar, 3 Jaffa cakes, 500ml water

8.30pm - Carrots and parsnips, Pork chop, Water

10.30pm - 2 slices white toast, Peanut butter, Water

Average daily energy intake - 3200kcal a day (range of 2900kcal to 3550kcal)

There are some sports where how the athlete looks has an influence on how much of certain foods are eaten. For example Olympic rhythmic gymnasts train 6 hours a day 6 days a week, split into three hours in the morning on skills and routines and then 1 hour weights or cardio work and 2 hours mat work later in the day. This group of athletes are very small in stature but strong. They eat on average 1 piece of bread a day.

Case studies supplied by members of Sports Dietitians UK (www.sportsdietitians.org.uk).

****Snack and mini meal ideas for armchair athletes: IMAGES AVAILABLE FOR RECIPES IN BOLD**

Snack ideas

- Sandwiches, rolls, French sticks, bagels etc toasted or plain with low fat fillings e.g. chicken, tuna, lean meat, low fat soft cheese and peanut butter and jam. Add vegetables as appropriate
- Toast with spicy prawns with guacamole
- Thai prawn cocktail sandwich
- Cereal bars eg Seeded Carrot Flapjacks and breakfast bars
- Jaffa cakes, Swiss rolls, scones, currant buns, malt loaf, iced fingers and buns – for the

sweet toothed!

- Twiglets and pretzels
- Fresh and dried fruit

Quick mini-meals

- Baked beans on toast or warmed pitta bread
- Curried baked beans on toast
- Spaghetti in tomato sauce on toast or warm pitta bread
- Lentil, thick vegetable or minestrone soups with bread, toast or pitta bread
- Toasted muffins with peanut butter and jam
- Pitta bread with tzatziki or low fat hummus

Slightly more substantial mini-meals (take a little longer to prepare)

- Jacket potatoes (cooked in oven or microwave) with baked beans or tuna
- “Halfway” pizza
- Quick and easy tuna pizza topping
- Mushrooms and bacon on toast

¹ Jane Griffin is available for interview about the role of bread in an athlete’s diet.

Jane Griffin is one of the most respected sports dietitians in the UK. In 1982 she added Sports Nutrition to her portfolio, becoming one of the first Accredited Sports Dietitian in the country. As the Consultant Nutritionist to the British Olympic Association from 1990 to 2001 she worked with a wide range of Olympic sports including archery, badminton, rowing and canoeing. Jane has since worked in a variety of team sports including England cricket, a number of premieriership rugby union and football clubs and England Netball. In 2002 Jane received the Ibox Award for Professional Achievement from the British Dietetic Association and in the same year was voted one of the ten leading dietitians in the country.

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