

Fueling your workout the healthy way

Food is your body's fuel. When it comes to exercise, healthy food can power you through a workout session, while less healthy food can leave you feeling flat.

Finding the right pre-workout foods doesn't have to be complicated. Listen to your body and keep track of your diet. This can help you discover what you should eat — and avoid eating — when you want to make the most of your exercise time.

No “quick fixes”

Though many products on the market claim to boost energy and performance, many of them aren't as healthy as nutritious, whole foods. Some energy bars and drinks contain high levels of sugar, caffeine and other additives. These may give you a quick “jolt,” but when your blood sugar drops and the caffeine wears off, you could feel sluggish or downright exhausted. Is timing everything?

Some athletes swear by eating 30 minutes before a workout. Others experience cramping or tiredness if they eat too close to when they exercise.

If you're doing an intense workout, such as running or high-impact aerobics, you may need to give your body longer to digest a meal. But lower-intensity activities, such as walking or gardening, may be more enjoyable if you've had a small meal first.



Healthy pre-workout choices

Whole foods are often a great choice pre-workout — and in daily life. But don't stick to fruits and vegetables only. The body needs some protein and fat to make energy. Try avocados, nuts, seeds, eggs, fish or beans with some fruit or veggies. If you're going to exercise within the hour, make it a smaller portion.

Skip sugary treats, sweetened beverages, and energy bars and drinks. Drink plenty of water before your workout and continue to drink during and afterward. If you'll be sweating excessively, a sports drink may be advised — but make water the drink of choice most of the time.

Coffee and exercise — a good match?

Some people find they have a better workout after they've had their morning cup of joe. This can be helpful for those who already drink coffee, but it's not for everyone. Coffee can dehydrate you, so drink plenty of water. And, if you don't already drink caffeinated beverages, you could end up jittery or anxious. If your doctor has told you to avoid caffeine, don't try this.

Consuming the right foods at the right time may help you feel your best during and after your workout.