



NUTRITION FOR THE TRAVELLING ATHLETE

Travelling away from home for training and competition is standard practice for most elite and recreational athletes. Unfortunately, the disruptions and distractions of a new environment, changes in schedule and exposure to different foods can significantly affect usual eating habits. Major nutritional challenges faced by athletes while travelling include:

- achieving carbohydrate and protein requirements
- meeting daily vitamin and mineral requirements
- balancing energy intake
- maintaining adequate hydration
- food safety

Pack your snacks!

Snacks are an important component of eating and recovery nutrition plans for most athletes, however access to quality snacks can be difficult when travelling. It pays to take a supply of portable, non-perishable snack foods that are unlikely to be available at the destination. It may be useful to send a package of supplies ahead to decrease baggage. Remember to check with customs/quarantine regarding foods that are restricted from crossing certain borders or entering certain countries.

Useful Food Items To Take

- cereal bars
- breakfast cereal
- canned snack pack fruits
- dried fruit
- instant noodles
- jam, honey, peanut butter
- powdered sports drink
- powdered liquid meal supplements
- powdered milk
- concentrated fruit juice
- baked beans and spaghetti

Hotels usually only cater for 3 meals/day. Arrange for snacks such as yoghurt, fruit and cereal bars to be placed out at meals so that athletes can take them for snacks later in the day. Alternatively, arrange for a communal area to be stocked with snacks (i.e. the manager's or "team" room).

It is essential that strategies are put in place to minimize the impact of travel on an athlete's food intake. Whether an athlete is travelling overseas or on a long local bus trip, the key to successful eating while on the move is planning and preparation.

Plan Ahead

A general plan consisting of where, when and what the athlete is planning to eat on each day should be constructed around the anticipated daily schedule. It is important to keep foods and meal times as similar as possible to the usual daily routine at home.

Research the Destination

Food patterns at the destination should be investigated as thoroughly as possible before leaving home:

- Are all important foods available?
- Is the accommodation self-catering or will it be necessary to rely on restaurants or take out?
- What are the hygiene and food safety risks?

The internet, travel agencies, embassies, competition organizers or other athletes who have travelled to the destination before can be used to gain information.

Meals and Snacks

Athletes are not used to forced inactivity therefore hours spent on a plane may lead to boredom. It is important that athletes avoid over-eating to relieve boredom. Taking other activities on board, drinking water regularly and chewing sugar-free gum can decrease the temptation to snack excessively on long flights. Alternatively, athletes with high-energy needs may struggle to meet their needs if they rely solely on in-flight catering. This may cause the athlete to arrive at the competition destination with reduced fuel stores.



FACT SHEET

Sports Dietetics

Several strategies can be taken to minimize these risks to performance:

- Find out if special meals (e.g. sports, low-fat, vegetarian) are available on the flight.
- Enquire about the in-flight menu and timing of the meal service in advance.
- On long flights, try to adopt a similar meal and sleep pattern to that anticipated at your destination. This may help to reduce the effects of jet lag.
- Athletes with reduced energy needs should pay particular attention to meals and snacks provided during the flight. It is not necessary to eat everything offered. It may be better to take your own snacks rather than be tempted by all the extra tid bits offered in flight.
- It is advisable to pack extra snacks in carry-on luggage. Food available for sale at airports tends to be expensive and it can be difficult to find nutritious options. It is always useful to have some supplies in case of unexpected delays.

In-Flight Fluid

The risk of becoming dehydrated on long flights is high as the pressurized cabins cause increased fluid losses from the skin and lungs. Symptoms of dehydration may include headaches or slight constipation. It is inadequate to rely on cabin service for fluid as the serve sizes of drinks is very small. Athletes should take their own supply of bottled water onto the flight to supplement the water, juice and soft drink provided in the air. Sports drinks are also a useful choice as they provide a small amount of sodium that helps promote thirst (therefore encourages a greater fluid intake), and decreases urine losses. Aim to drink approximately 1 cup per hour during the flight. Caffeine-containing fluids such as tea, coffee and cola drinks may cause increased urine production, but can still contribute to a positive fluid balance in athletes (especially in those who regularly drink caffeinated drinks). Alcohol should be avoided on flights.

Food Safety at the Destination

Gastrointestinal problems are common when travelling to foreign destinations. These can occur in both developing countries and 'safe' destinations. Adopting good personal hygiene and food safety practices will help to decrease the risk of infection and illness.

If the local water is unsafe to drink:

- Drink only bottled water or drinks from sealed containers.
- Avoid ice in drinks.
- Clean teeth with bottled water.
- Avoid salad vegetables unless washed in bottled or boiled water.
- Only eat fruit if it can be peeled.
- In 'high risk' areas:
- Eat only from reputable hotels or well known franchises.
- Avoid street stalls and markets.
- Be wary of fish and shellfish.
- Only consume food that is steaming hot or has been refrigerated adequately.

At all destinations:

- Avoid sharing cups, bottles or utensils as infections and illness can be transmitted this way.



Contact: Head Dietitian
N/education/factsheets