



# Fueling Gymnasts

## Fueling Your Sport

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- Gymnastics is a sport that requires strength, coordination, flexibility, mental concentration, motivation, and dedication. Good nutrition can keep you physically and mentally sharp.
- Your calorie needs depend on your age, growth, gender, body weight, body composition, and training.
- You need enough calories to fuel your sport and to help you grow and develop.
- You may think that losing weight or keeping your body small will help your performance. However, dieting is not always a good idea. It can lead to poor nutrition, cause fatigue, and increase your risk for injury.
- Carbohydrate is the main fuel that gymnasts need. Make sure you get enough of it. If you don't, you will be chronically fatigued and your performance will suffer.
- Eat 2.3 to 3.6 grams of carbohydrate per pound of body weight per day (5 to 8 g/kg/day).
- Include carbohydrates in your breakfast (see Suggestions for 1-Minute Breakfasts) and have a carbohydrate-rich snack 30 to 60 minutes before practice or competition.
- Snack breaks are important for gymnasts. After 2½ to 3 hours of training, your body will be almost out of carbohydrates.
- Your body needs protein to grow and to repair muscles.
- If you don't eat enough calories, protein (including your muscle) is broken down to provide your body with fuel.
- Eat 0.55 to 0.8 grams of protein per pound of body weight per day (1.2 to 1.7 g/kg/day).
- Good sources of protein include fish, chicken, turkey, beef, low-fat milk, cheese, yogurt, eggs, nuts, and soy foods (tofu, soy nuts, soy burgers).
- Your body needs some fat to be healthy and strong. Don't avoid it completely.

## 1-Minute Breakfasts

- Whole grain breakfast cereal topped with skim milk and fresh blueberries
- 6 to 8 ounces of plain low-fat yogurt with granola cereal stirred into the yogurt
- Package of instant oatmeal or instant grits mixed with milk
- Small muffin topped with vanilla yogurt
- Whole wheat toast with crunchy peanut butter
- Toasted pumpernickel bread with a slice of melted cheese
- Instant breakfast in skim milk
- Lean ham on a half of sesame seed bagel
- Calcium-fortified cottage cheese and canned fruit
- Toasted whole grain waffle topped with fresh strawberries

- Eat at least 0.45 grams of fat per pound of body weight per day (1 g/kg/day).
- Choose lower-fat foods (such as low-fat milk and yogurt, grilled chicken, baked chips, and steamed vegetables) to help limit calories from fat.

## Fluid Needs

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- Two hours before practice, drink 2 cups of fluid.
- During practice, drink 5 to 10 ounces of fluid every 15 to 20 minutes.
- After practice, drink enough fluid so that your urine has a pale, straw color. This is a sign that your body is hydrated.
- Choose sport drinks. They replace electrolytes lost in sweat, and they have carbohydrates to fuel muscles. One cup of sport drink contains 55 to 75 calories. That's fewer calories than in a glass of fruit juice.

## Supplements Used by Gymnasts

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- If you are younger than 18 years, you should not use dietary supplements (except for multivitamin/mineral supplements or calcium if they are recommended by a doctor or dietitian). It is not known whether dietary supplements are safe for young athletes.
- Many supplements claim to melt fat, provide energy, improve stamina, or increase endurance. None of these claims are proven. Be aware that the people who endorse supplements are usually paid by supplement makers.

## Top Three Nutrition Tips for Improving Performance

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- 1. Think of food as fuel, not the fattening enemy.** As you get older, you get taller and gain weight. This is normal and healthy. Being lighter or smaller does not always mean being a better gymnast.
- 2. Eat a high-performance diet.** Eating a well-balanced diet will help you in your sport. Choose high-performance foods that are packed with nutrients, not just fun foods with empty calories. See the list of high-performance foods in this handout.
- 3. Have a nutrition plan.** Just as you train to compete, you should train to eat. Learn which foods make you feel energized, and eat them in training before trying them in competition. Get on a food and fluid schedule that fits with your training schedule. Your body is a high-performance machine, and it has to have high-quality food as fuel and adequate fluids so it won't break down.

## High-Performance Foods

- Low-fat yogurt
- Bean soup with breadsticks
- String cheese with crackers
- English muffin pizza
- Chicken, turkey, roast beef, or tuna sandwich
- Skim milk and peanut butter on crackers
- Energy bars
- Cereal and milk topped with a banana or fresh berries

### Nutrition Prescription:

- \_\_\_\_\_ calories per day
- \_\_\_\_\_ grams of carbohydrate per day
- \_\_\_\_\_ grams of protein per day
- \_\_\_\_\_ grams of fat per day
- \_\_\_\_\_ cups of fluid per day

Special concerns: