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What To Eat And When To Eat For Elite Wrestlers

By John McGovern

Most fitness civilians can recover at their own pace from workouts because they don't deplete themselves of their carbohydrate stores in a typical workout like wrestlers. However, for elite athletes like wrestlers paying attention to pre-workout and post work-out carbohydrate ingestion is essential to optimal training and performance. Here are some suggestions for using food to your advantage before, during, and after competition.

The pre-competition meals should be monitored closely during the 24-48 hours prior to competition. Often the more intense the competition the higher the anxiety level. If you are too nervous to consume a lot of food before competition eat frequent smaller snacks with easily digested foods like bananas or a sports nutrition shake. In general, it is best to start building your carbohydrate stores in the blood for competition by eating high-fiber, low-glycemic index foods like apples two to three days before competition. Do not experiment with new foods or supplements during this the time period, save that for the off-season. Build into the quick release good carbohydrates such as single ingredient whole foods like raisins and potatoes. Remember when you eat a regular meal it takes about three hours to digest before your competition. Avoid a meal that is too heavy for example a steak or hamburger. Eat a light snack apple, banana, yogurt, about one hour prior to competing. Make your pre-competition meals about two-thirds easily digested carbs, and only about one-sixth protein and one-sixth fats. Fats and proteins take longer to digest and can make you feel bloated prior to competition. Do not avoid protein and fats altogether, just make them lighter on the digestive track. Instead of hamburger or steak go for chicken soup, turkey, tuna, or a protein drink. You want the blood ready to pump in the muscles and not in the stomach kicking in enzymes to digest the proteins from steak during your match. If you take liquid nutritional supplements or energy bars make sure they are cleared by your coaching staff and/or athletic trainer. Many substances once thought of as harmless are now banned by the NCAA and many high school associations.

Article provided by: Jon McGovern (<http://www.jonmcgovern.com>)



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When deciding whether to eat or how much to eat before a wrestling workout or competition, make the decision based on your energy level during your workouts or competitions and adjust accordingly. If you find yourself sluggish or running out of steam during your workouts, then you may need to take in more carbohydrates. If your last meal was three to four hours before your workout, then you should eat a snack high in quick energy carbohydrates. Foods like whole bagels, crackers, fig bars, juice, granola, or carbohydrate drinks or an even small meal within the 30-90 minutes before your workout would help keep your energy and blood sugar levels stable.

After making weight, focus on foods and fluids that will help you recover and won't negatively affect performance. The best choices for replacing sweat losses include: juices, which supply water, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals (electrolytes). Watery foods such as watermelon, grapes, and soups that supply fluid, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals, high carb sports drinks, and water are excellent choices. Good competition day snacks include: bagels, bananas, apples, fig bars, cereals, applesauce, granola bars, sports drinks, and grapes, whole grain bread, brown rice, pancakes, fish, fresh fruit, beans, peas, and lentils. Avoid bulky, fatty or seedy foods. Again choose foods high in carbohydrates and moderate in protein and fats. If you become dehydrated during an unusually long and strenuous bout of exercise, you should drink frequently for the next day or two. Your body may take up to 48 hours to replace the sweat losses. That is why in wrestling you should never lose more than 2% of your body weight in practice (for example 3 lbs for a 150 lb person). You should always drink water throughout the practice. On day of weigh-ins if you need to lose more than three pounds make sure that you keep the water intake high and do your sweating no more than four to five hours prior to weigh-ins. Studies have shown that being deprived of water for longer periods of five hours or more and your body starts to turn cannibalize muscle protein for energy. If you start losing the water weight more than five hours prior to weigh-ins, you have just cost your muscles some serious protein and in the end you will be a weaker competitor for it. If you do need to lose a few pounds for a match, don't stop liquid intake until two hours before weigh-ins then rehydrate immediately after weigh-in.

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To properly recover from making weight a wrestler needs water. Water and electrolytes are needed to replenish glycogen stores, reduce muscle and oxidative stress and rebuild muscle protein. The role of hydration can not be overstated. Fluid and electrolyte replenishment is crucial in maintaining cardiac output and regulating body temperature during exercise. Water is important but it is not the only component. Electrolytes must be replaced as well and this cannot be accomplished by water alone. Supplements that could be considered for post weigh-ins are a carbohydrate/protein mix or fluid replacement drink, vitamins c & e, glutamine, and branch chained amino acids. After your workout eat carbs and a moderate amount of proteins in your meal within thirty minutes of your workout. Then eat a main meal about sixty to ninety minutes after your workout. Good examples would be: fresh fruits, bagels, raisins, yogurt, tuna, pretzels, granola bars, fruit juices and sports drinks. Ideally, you should consume carbohydrate rich foods and beverages within fifteen minutes of making weight. That is when the enzymes responsible for making glycogen are most active and will most rapidly replace the depleted glycogen stores. You'll need about 75 grams of carbohydrates or 300 calories within the first thirty minutes to aid your recovery. Two hours later you should eat another 300 calories of high carbohydrate and high protein foods. Some examples might be an eight ounce glass of orange juice and a peanut butter covered bagel, twelve ounces of cranberry juice and an eight ounce cup of yogurt, or one bowl of corn flakes with a milk and a banana. Don't avoid protein in your recovery. Protein, like carbohydrate can stimulate the action of insulin, the hormone that transports glucose from the blood into the muscles. Eat protein rich foods with carbohydrate rich foods. Combinations such as protein rich milk with cereal, turkey on a bagel, protein rich yogurt with juice are good examples.

Remember if you decide you must experiment with your diet, do so in the off-season. This will give you an idea of what sits best with your digestive tract. Focus more on healthy eating than dieting in the off-season. The best approach to take for healthy eating and nutrition is a year round approach. When choosing your meals and snacks base your nutrition game plan on variety, moderation, and wholesomeness. Each food offers special and unique combinations of nutrients in their most bio-available form. Oranges may offer vitamin c and carbohydrates but no iron or

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protein. A slice of roast beef offers iron and protein but no vitamin c or carbohydrates. There is no one magic food. Remember you'll do best eating a variety of fresh foods that are low in processing.