

ENERGISE

A TRIATHLETE'S DIET

Your nutrition can make or break your race whether you are a beginner or an experienced triathlete.

Text Jacklyn Reuters

Triathletes train hard in three disciplines and therefore need all the best nutrients to fuel their body and remain in tip-top shape, free from injury. Here, we round up the best of the best food items that should be an integral part of every triathlete's diet. These foods should be in your pre- and post-race meal plan to have less fat, more muscles and faster recovery times. **R**

Photo: David Laundy/istockphoto.com

CARBS FOR ENERGY



WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Carbohydrate is the primary source of energy for a triathlete. Foods that contain carbohydrate will eventually be broken down to glucose and transported around the body to where they are utilised. The storage form of glucose in the body is glycogen. Glycogen is stored in the liver and muscle. Before training, it is important to have sufficient glycogen stores to delay the onset of fatigue. After training, it is also crucial that you quickly replenish the glycogen stores for recovery and prepare for the next training session.

PHOTO: DEPOSITPHOTOS/PAOLO ALZANI



Multigrain Bread

Multigrain bread is great before a good training session. It is low in fat, high in fibre and has a low glycemic index which allows a sustained release of energy to keep you going. Two slices of multigrain bread provides about 30g of carbohydrate, 6g of protein and 5g of fibre. It goes well with grilled chicken, eggs or tuna as fillings.



White Bread

White bread can play a very important role in a triathlete's diet. Being high in glycemic index, it is great for replenishing carbohydrate levels immediately after a race. Spread some jam or honey on it and wash it down with a sports drink for a perfect recovery snack.



Pasta

Pasta makes a good meal before exercise. It is low in glycemic index and pairs well with a high protein sauce that is also rich in iron. Example: Spaghetti Bolognese. 200g of cooked pasta provides about 50g of carbohydrate and 270kcal. Adjust the portions to suit your personal needs.



Rice

Long grain white rice or brown rice is ideal for before training. Give and take two hours before all the energy is released which means you can last longer during exercise. Short grain white rice is suitable for after training because it has a high glycemic index which is great for recovery. They increase blood glucose levels immediately upon consumption and muscle glycogen stores are quickly replenished. 200g of cooked rice provides between 45-55g of carbohydrate.

PROTEIN FOR MUSCLE RECOVERY



WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The primary functions of protein are to promote muscle growth, repair tissue and aid in its recovery. It is crucial to integrate it at all meals. Triathletes generally damage muscle tissues at trainings, and proteins allow growth of more muscle tissue. Without protein, muscle repair is not possible. After training, it is found that including some protein in your diet increases gains in lean body mass.



Salmon

Salmon is high in protein and essential fatty acids, namely omega 3 fatty acids. 100g of salmon contains 20g of protein, 5g of fat and 120kcal. It is easily digested into amino acids and transported around the body to the muscle cells for repair.



Beef Tenderloin

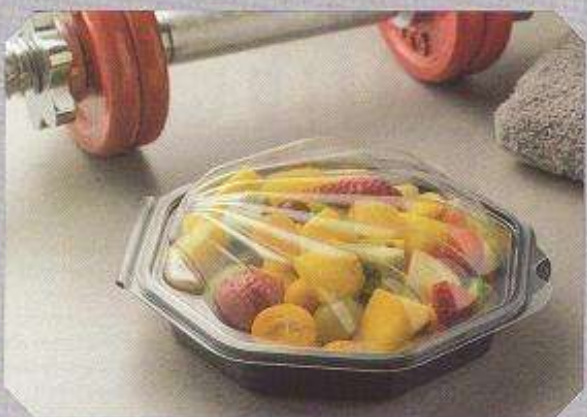
Beef tenderloin is not only high in protein and B vitamins but is also the leanest cut of beef. Depending on the cuts of the beef, the total fat content can range from 5g to 30g per 100g. Beef tenderloin provides 20g protein and 1.5mg of iron per 100g. It is also a great source of haem iron which is more readily absorbed by your body. Lack of iron will result in lethargy and lack of stamina. B vitamins are important for energy release in carbohydrate metabolism. Include beef in your diet at least once a week.



Calcium-Fortified Tofu

Vegetarian athletes need to up their protein intake as they can easily fall short. Although tofu is plant protein, it is still a good source and is extremely versatile in any cuisine. You can have it in salads, soups or stir-fries. As the name suggests, it contains calcium and sometimes iron. Read the food labels so that you purchase the right one.

FRUITS FOR ESSENTIAL VITAMINS



WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Fruits are consumed mainly for vitamins, minerals and fibre. Triathletes need them just as much or even more.



Kiwi

Kiwi is extremely high in vitamin C. Two kiwi fruits make one serving and provides 130mg of vitamin C and 4g of fibre. Vitamin C is required for enhanced absorption of iron. It is best to eat them immediately after a steak meal (which is high in iron). Triathletes are subjected to sun damage and skin dryness. Vitamin C increases collagen formation and also acts as a powerful antioxidant.



Banana

Banana is well known as an excellent source of carbohydrate and has a high glycemic index. It is probably the only fruit that is useful before, during and after a triathlon. One medium banana provides approximately 26g of carbohydrate, 400mg of potassium and 10mg of vitamin C. It is great for reducing muscle cramps and giving a boost of energy.

FACTS

- 1 A triathlete needs to eat 200g of carbohydrate four hours before exercise to ensure an adequate supply of glycogen.
- 2 Female triathletes need double the amount of iron as compared to their male counterparts.
- 3 Sweating improves temperature regulation in a triathlete. Sweating cools the body down to prevent heat exhaustion.

FALLACIES

Drinking water is sufficient during the run since I would have loaded up on sports drink during my cycle.

Truth

The more opportunities you get to drink a sports drink, the better. A constant supply of carbohydrate, potassium and sodium is the key to peak performance.

No fat is best.

Truth

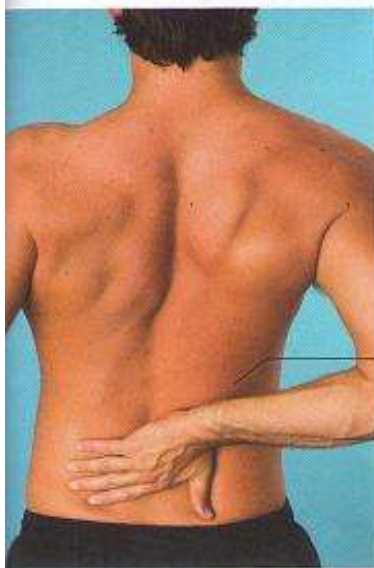
We still need fat in our diet to cushion our organs and transport fat soluble vitamins A, D, E and K. Excess fat and saturated fat is what we want to keep to a minimum. Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats are the preferred types of fats.

Triathletes can eat more junk food since they will be burning off the calories.

Truth

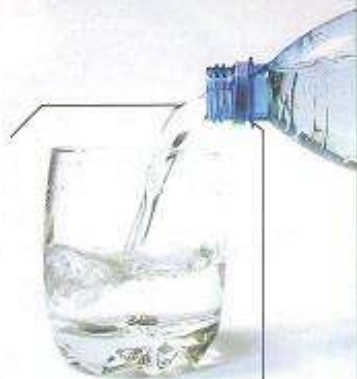
Calorie wise, that is partly true but the excess fat and sugar make you sluggish and will impair your performance.

DID YOU KNOW?



Iron supplementation is only useful for those who have iron deficiency anaemia? Those who have adequate amounts of iron and take iron pills can end up with iron toxicity which can be life threatening.

Eating too much protein can promote the onset of fatigue and strain your kidneys? Protein can displace carbohydrate foods which is the body's preferred source of energy. Every gram of protein ingested has to be handled by your kidneys, so don't overload them.



Water helps you burn fat and build muscle? Dehydration decreases protein synthesis and can increase fat synthesis.



A triathlete needs 30-60g of carbohydrate per hour to delay fatigue? This is equivalent to 500-1000ml of sports drink or 10-20 jelly beans.

Caffeine content of 6-8 cups of coffee exceeds the limit of the International Olympic Committee standards?