Foods to Eat After Your Workout

Hard workouts require proper nutrition to fuel and refuel working muscles. In fact, what you eat post-workout is just as important as the food consumed prior to physical exercise. Common questions surrounding post-workout meals are the best foods to eat and how long should you wait to eat.

Before answering those questions, it's important to understand the importance of food intake to support your workouts and how your body responds to the demands of physical exercise. During an exercise session, [energy stores (glycogen)](https://www.verywellfit.com/what-is-glycogen-2242008) are depleted, muscle tissue is damaged, and fluids along with electrolytes are lost through sweat.

Post-workout nutrients are essential for replenishing the muscle glycogen depleted from physical demands. Also, consuming an exercise recovery meal helps stimulate protein synthesis to repair and build new muscle tissue and restore fluid and electrolyte balance.

Factoring in Nutrients and Timing

According to research, consuming the right amount of carbohydrates and protein is especially important after a workout﻿ When to eat depends on the type of workout performed according to a few studies﻿

Intense weight resistance workouts with a goal of increasing muscle size, it's suggested to consume 20–30 grams of lean protein and 30–40 grams of [healthy carbohydrates](https://www.verywellfit.com/good-and-bad-carbohydrates-3121405) as close to your post-workout as possible.

For lighter aerobic workouts with a goal to stay in shape, eat a well-balanced meal with the same ratio up to one hour after exercising. There are some theories that an anabolic window diminishes as time progresses without adequate carbohydrate and protein intake﻿

Although it's recommended to eat within an hour after weight training or as close to your post-workout as possible, some research indicates the anabolic window can last at least 24 hours.﻿﻿ It appears the most important factor in [your post-workout meal](https://www.verywellfit.com/smart-post-workout-meals-and-snacks-1087879) is not necessarily nutrient timing but just making sure you are eating the right foods for your individualized fitness goals.

Eating Well and Staying Hydrated

Essential nutrients are required after a hard workout with carbohydrates and protein being the main focus. Drinking plenty of water and sometimes a [sports recovery drink](https://www.verywellfit.com/are-organic-sports-drinks-better-for-exercise-recovery-4102190) during longer sessions of exercise is also necessary for fluid replenishment.

Average sweat loss during exercise is about 0.5–2 liters per hour. Typically, any weight loss of greater than 2% during exercises will significantly decreased performance and weight exceeding 4% may lead to heat illnesses.

Sports nutrition research recommends drinking 2–3 cups (16–24 ounces) of water for each pound of body weight lost during a workout. Active adults typically don't weigh in after a workout, so a good rule to follow is [drinking plenty of fluids during and after physical activity](https://www.verywellfit.com/fluid-replacement-for-active-individuals-4153349) to avoid dehydration.

Don't Skip Post-Workout Meals

Food intake is a key component to athletic success pre and post-workout. Athletes use a range of dietary strategies to improve exercise performance including eating carbohydrates and especially protein following workout programs. They also focus on maintaining proper hydration during and after physical training.

According to a study on the role of nutrients for post-exercise recovery, without adequate carbohydrates, proteins, and fluids, performance can be impaired.﻿﻿

Consuming carbohydrates along with protein immediately after exercise has shown to be an excellent strategy to maximize rates of muscle glycogen synthesis (energy restored to muscle cells).

Eating additional protein within an hour after exercise is also shown to improve muscle glycogen stores.﻿﻿

Hard workouts leave your muscles starving for fuel. Without adequate nutrients to restore depleted glycogen stores, protein balance is said to remain in a negative state. Skipping meals post-workout can contribute to an imbalance or negative physiological environment not conducive to building muscle tissue or repairing tissue damaged from exercise.﻿﻿

The goal is to maintain a positive or net protein balance achieved by eating adequate amounts of macronutrients before, during, and especially after exercise. [Improved muscle protein synthesis](https://www.verywellfit.com/muscle-protein-synthesis-and-muscle-growth-4148337) rates were shown for athletes consuming both carbohydrates and protein immediately following exercise.

Post-Workout Meal Tips

The post-workout meal doesn't have to be complicated nor does it require expensive shakes or supplements. The most important part of eating right is planning and preparing your meals. Your body will appreciate a meal ready to go when the workout is done.

Healthy and Convenient Post-Workout Foods

* Brown rice
* Chocolate milk
* Fruit
* Lean proteins
* Nut butter
* Power greens
* Quinoa
* Whole grain wraps/tortillas
* Yogurt

Costly commercial recovery foods like protein powder can be purchased and some people opt for this convenience. However, it's just as easy and more [budget-friendly to buy and prepare healthy food](https://www.verywellfit.com/building-muscle-on-a-budget-3121402). You will have a ready stock of quality whole foods for frequent meals to keep your body fueled after a hard workout.

Post-Workout Meal Ideas

Preparing your post-workout food is also part of the fun of maintaining a healthy body and lifestyle. Below is a sampling of meals that can be enjoyed after a great workout.

* **Brown rice and boneless skinless chicken breast**: Prepare with your favorite low-sodium spices or salsa for a nutritious recovery meal. This can be done in the crockpot, stovetop, or oven. [Some athletes prefer white rice over brown](https://www.verywellfit.com/lifters-still-choose-white-rice-over-brown-3121319) to reduce possible stomach upset from the higher fiber intake.
* **Egg scramble**: Easy one-skillet meals where one whole egg, vegetables, and sweet potatoes can be tossed with favorite spices and sprinkled with fresh black pepper.
* **Leftovers**: What you cooked the night before is calling your name and ready to refuel that body. Do you have cooked quinoa ready to go? Toss on salad greens and sprinkle with balsamic for a well-balanced meal.
* [**Peanut butter**](https://www.verywellfit.com/why-peanut-butter-is-the-favored-sports-superfood-3121361): The all-American favorite sandwich on whole-grain sprouted toast is a post-workout pleaser. Leave off the sugared jam and enjoy with a drizzle of local honey. This nutrient-dense meal contains quality plant protein, healthy fat, and high fiber.
* **Power smoothie**: Blend your favorite fruit with non-fat Greek yogurt, or favorite tolerated dairy, some water, and ice. A great boost of healthy fats can be added with a spoonful of your favorite nut butter.
* **Wraps**: Whole grain high fiber wraps are a great start to a wonderful recovery meal. Add some fresh avocado, lean meat of your choice, greens, beans, or whatever suits the theme of the wrap, roll up and enjoy.

Additional snacks to enjoy recommended by the American Council on Exercise:

* Albacore tuna (4 ounces) on 1 slice whole-grain toast
* Banana with 1 tablespoon almond or nut butter
* [Low-fat chocolate milk](https://www.verywellfit.com/build-a-better-body-with-chocolate-milk-4047824)
* Non-fat Greek yogurt with 1/2 cup fruit or banana
* Protein shake with 2 scoops [whey protein](https://www.verywellfit.com/best-whey-protein-powders-4165362) and 1/2 banana blended with water
* Whole wheat English muffin or whole wheat pita topped with a slice of low sodium turkey meat and hummus

Finding what healthy foods work best for you post-workout will be through trial and error. Having a nutritional strategy in place will create the success of your food plan post and pre-workout.

Eating the right foods to fuel your body after exercise will be the most important part of achieving your goals. Other suggestions are not to skip meals and remember to drink plenty of water.