What to Eat Before Strength Training
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Before intense training, your nutrition goals are two-fold: 1) to have enough energy to get the best workout possible and 2) to minimize muscle protein breakdown and maximize muscle protein synthesis. Of course you also want to make sure that you don’t eat or drink something that will make your stomach sick or uncomfortable during your workout!

The best way to do this is to consume a LOW FAT pre-workout meal or snack that provides both carbohydrate and a source of high quality protein 1 to 4 hours before you train (1 hour for a light snack; 3-4 hours for a large meal). Why? Carbs are digested fast, so they provide immediate energy and blood sugar stabilization for exercise. If it’s been a while since your last meal/snack, your blood sugar may be a little low and you may feel light-headed, weak, and grouchy if you don’t eat (not a good combination for a strong workout!). Fats take too long to be digested so if you eat a high fat meal (think burger and fries) before exercise, you’re likely to have an unhappy stomach or intestinal track (think nausea and diarrhea) during your work-out.

Protein provides essential amino acids, which are the building blocks for muscle repair and growth during (and after) resistance training.

So how much and what exactly do you need? Before resistance training, it’s best to consume 6 g of essential amino acids (which can be provided by ~12-15 g of high quality protein), along with a good source of carbohydrate. Any balanced meal eaten 2-4 hours before training will work. For a quick pre-workout snack ~1 hour before you train, try one of the following. NOTE: If you have a really sensitive tummy, a beverage with ~12-15 g protein is usually better tolerated than solid food.

- 12 oz. low fat chocolate milk (12 g protein, 39 g carbs)
- 1 Boost High Protein shake (15 g protein, 33 g carbs)
- ½ c. low fat cottage cheese and ½ c. fruit (15 g protein, 19 g carbs)
- 1 c. cooked oatmeal and 1 c. fat free milk (14 g protein, 36 g carbs)
- 1 English muffin with 1 whole egg + 2 egg whites (16 g protein, 30 g carbs)

What if you work out very early in the morning and really can’t stomach anything before you train hard? As long as you follow a good nutrition plan every day, and as a result, have optimal muscle glycogen stores and a stable blood sugar level when you wake up, you can get through a 60-minute tough morning workout without any pre-training fuel. But, it’s absolutely critical that you eat a balanced breakfast as soon as possible after your workout to minimize muscle protein breakdown and promote recovery and growth. See the article on “What to Eat After Strength Training” for more details on that.

For more information about nutrition and health, visit www.canyons.edu/health/nutritioncoach.