

Lunch and Lunchtime Fitness

For a lot of people the only time they can fit regular physical activity into their working day is by exercising at lunchtime. For busy people, those who start work early or finish late, and/or for those who find winter mornings and evenings just too hard, this is a great time to undertake fitness activities.

The lunchtime time slot can however, present a dilemma with where to fit the eating part of lunch in. Do you eat before you exercise or after you exercise? How do you work it so you are not hungry and have enough energy to exercise efficiently but you are not too full? For some people this dilemma can be so significant that it becomes the reason why they don't use this time slot for fitness activities. That's okay if fitness fits somewhere else in the day but for people whose only window of opportunity to exercise is lunchtime this is a dilemma worth sorting out.

Food and fluid are essential for maintaining the proper functioning of our bodies' vital systems. They are also important for fuelling our physical activities and for contributing to better performance, and so it is important to eat and drink before exercise. But pre exercise food and fluid can only act as fuel if they have been digested and absorbed properly, and so the timing of pre activity food and fluid intake is also important.

The time it takes for proper digestion and absorption to happen varies depending on the type and quantity of food and fluid consumed. Generally, foods that are high in fat, protein and fibre take longer to digest than those that are lower in these. This means that pre exercise food should ideally be low in fat, moderate in fibre and contain carbohydrate. Fluids – particularly water – should be consumed regularly during the day, including up to 15-20 minutes prior to exercising.

The amount of food and fluid consumed is also a factor in how quickly and efficiently digestion and absorption takes place. Generally the smaller the amount the quicker and more efficiently digestion and absorption will occur.

Here's a general guide to the kinds of food and fluid that may be consumed prior to exercise for food and fluid to have a positive impact on energy levels and physical performance without causing tummy discomfort or upsets.

3-4 hours before exercising:

crumpets or toast
sandwiches or a bread roll with cheese/meat/salad filling
pasta or rice with low fat sauce/topping
banana, fruit salad and/or yoghurt
milk or juice

1-2 hours before exercising

milkshake or fruit smoothie
sports bars
cereal bars
yoghurt
fruit
sports drink or water

less than 1 hour before exercising

sports bars

sports/carbohydrate gel

plain crackers

sports drink or water

Post exercise food and fluid are just as important as pre exercise nutrition. Low fat, moderate fibre and carbohydrate foods should be consumed within 30-40 minutes of exercising to replenish the body and restore energy levels. It is also recommended that 200-250mls of fluid be consumed every 15-20 minutes for up to an hour or so after exercising to ensure proper re-hydration.

Follow these guidelines and eating around your lunchtime fitness activities will be easier and you will be perform better – before, during and after your lunchtime exercise.

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