

3 Big Eating Mistakes Swimmers Make on Race Day

You've dedicated hours of your practice to perfecting your technique, and hours more repeating drills with your coach. You've trained hard all season, and you have probably thrown in a few extra practice sessions in preparation for a big race day. You feel ready, but before you set off, there are three common mistakes swimmers make on, and just before, race day. Don't let these dietary blunders jeopardize your performance on the big day.

MISTAKE ONE: EXPERIMENTING BEFORE RACE DAY

Being a top level swimmer requires that you stick to your routine, and keep your healthy diet, regular mealtimes, and hydration levels constant. Making adjustments to any of these factors are best done at the beginning of the season. Right before race day is not a good time to experiment.

Don't carbo-load the night before a big race. Giving your body more carbohydrates than it can process can affect your digestion, and prevent you from feeling well-rested and performing at your best the next day. This not only can be a negative on the physical side, but also mentally. Rather opt for a well balanced dinner that has the right amount of carbs, proteins, vitamins and minerals. Pasta primavera, with chicken and your favourite veggies is a great meal option, although be sure to go light on acidic vegetables like tomatoes, as they may leave you feeling nauseous. Adding a light snack a few hours before going to bed can help ensure your muscles have enough glycogen stores for optimal energy levels for your race. A plain yogurt mixed with berries and a handful of granola are some examples of a balanced pre-bedtime snack.

Avoid experimenting with high-fiber foods on race day or the night before. While fiber is important for overall health you don't want to have too much of it before your race, especially if your body is not used to having a lot of it. High-fiber foods such as beans and bran cereals are best avoided. Rather opt for small portions of fruits and veggies, for example a cup of pineapple, a handful of cherries or broccoli florets.

MISTAKE TWO: NOT EATING BREAKFAST

Last minute preparation or nerves are often the reasons why too many swimmers make the big mistake of skipping breakfast. Eating breakfast, at home or on the road, provides a crucial metabolism boost for swimmers, and as studies show, helps maintain steady blood sugar and energy levels to help you power through your race. Waiting until the middle of the day to fuel up is not going to make up for energy you miss when you skip breakfast.

If you're competing in the morning, make sure you have a light breakfast, and save a heavier breakfast for when you are only competing in the afternoon. You can experiment with different breakfasts on the days leading up to your race to find out what works best for you. Some healthy, energy-packed, options to try are instant oatmeal made with skim or low fat milk, toast with nut butter, dry cereal, yogurt and fruit. If you think you'll be too nervous or rushed for solid food, you could make a smoothie with some fruit and milk.

MISTAKE THREE: NOT BRINGING ENOUGH SNACKS

Snacks are a great energy source for between races, but often swimmers forget to pack them, don't bring enough or pack the wrong ones. The best snacks are small and usually have a mix of

protein and carbohydrates. The protein is important for keeping your blood sugar and energy levels stable, and your hunger at bay. Easy to digest snacks with proteins may be low fat cheese sticks, yogurt, nuts, low fat milk, hummus or a hardboiled egg. As your muscles rely on carbohydrates for fuel, you want to be sure you include a combination of easily digestible and complex carbohydrate your snack. Your simple carbohydrates could be 100% juice, applesauce, fresh or dried fruit, or sticks of vegetables. Examples of complex carbohydrates that would be a good addition to any snack pack include crackers, pretzels, graham crackers, unsweetened dry cereal, or pita and other breads.

The wrong snacks to pack are anything with refined sugars such as soda, candy and desserts. Try to avoid these on race day, which is much easier to do if you have your own stash of health snacks.

Avoiding these three mistakes can help keep you on your path to swim success and will help prime you to perform your best on race day.

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