



FUELING YOUNG SWIMMERS

A practical, realistic nutrition guide for Breakers families - Competitive swimmers ages 9–16

FOOD IS FUEL. FOOD IS GROWTH. FOOD IS RECOVERY.

Young swimmers are training, going to school, growing, building bones, developing muscle and recovering. Nutrition has to support the whole person—not just the next race.

THE BIG PICTURE

There is no single “swimmer diet.” A 9-year-old and a 16-year-old may have very different needs, and a swimmer's needs can change quickly during a growth spurt or heavier training block. Eat regularly, include carbohydrate foods, include protein, eat a variety of foods, drink regularly, and recover after training.

APPETITE IS INFORMATION

A growing swimmer may suddenly be much hungrier. That is not automatically a problem. Growth and training both require energy.

THE DAILY FORMULA

3 meals + regular snacks. At meals, aim for a carbohydrate + protein + fruit/vegetable + healthy fat. Snacks help bridge long school-to-practice gaps.

AGES 9–11: GROWING & LEARNING TO FUEL

Focus on regular meals, varied foods, hydration and learning hunger/fullness cues. Parents provide food regularly, pack snacks, offer variety and keep easy options available. Easy meals include oatmeal + banana + milk; eggs + toast + fruit; cereal + milk + berries; bagel + peanut butter + banana; chicken + rice + vegetables; pasta + meat sauce + fruit; turkey sandwich + yogurt + fruit; quesadilla + fruit + milk.

AGES 12–16: PUBERTY + INCREASED NEEDS

Puberty can change appetite, height, muscle development, body composition, sleep needs and energy requirements. Boys and girls need the same basic foundation: enough total food, carbohydrate for training, protein for growth and repair, healthy fats, fluids and a wide variety of foods.

BOYS DURING PUBERTY

Rapid growth and increasing muscle mass can come with a big increase in appetite. Keep easy foods available: sandwiches, bagels, oatmeal, cereal, eggs, yogurt, milk, cheese, fruit, rice, pasta, potatoes, chicken and leftovers.

GIRLS DURING PUBERTY

Girls also need enough overall energy to support growth and training. Once menstruation begins, iron needs increase. Include lean red meat, eggs, fish, beans, lentils, tofu, nuts/seeds and iron-fortified cereals. Persistent fatigue or reduced endurance should be discussed with a healthcare professional.

BONE HEALTH

Adolescence is an important time for bone development. Regular food intake, calcium-rich foods and adequate vitamin D are important.

TRAINING DAY

2–4 hours before practice: normal meal with carbohydrate, some protein and fluids. 30–90 minutes before: smaller familiar snack if hungry. During regular practice: water is generally appropriate. During prolonged, particularly intense or high-volume training, additional carbohydrate and electrolytes may sometimes be useful. After: carbohydrate + protein + fluid.

MEET DAY

Don't try something new. Eat normally the day before. Have a familiar breakfast. Between races: small + frequent. For long meets, pack more food than you expect to need. Water is the everyday drink; sports drinks can be useful in prolonged/intense competition when extra carbohydrate/electrolytes are needed. Energy drinks are not a youth performance strategy.

EASY RECIPES

Swimmer Breakfast Bowl: oatmeal + milk + banana/berries + peanut/seed butter + granola. Breakfast Bagel: bagel + peanut/seed butter or cream cheese + fruit + milk. Overnight Oats: oats + milk + yogurt + fruit + nut/seed butter. Egg Muffins: eggs + cheese + peppers + ham/turkey; bake at 350°F about 18–20 minutes. Banana Peanut Butter Roll-Up: tortilla + peanut/seed butter + banana. Swimmer Smoothie: milk + yogurt + banana + berries + peanut/seed butter + optional oats. Homemade Energy Bites: oats + nut/seed butter + honey + mini chocolate chips + flax/coconut. Turkey & Cheese Quesadilla: tortilla + cheese + turkey. Chicken Rice Bowl: rice + chicken + vegetables + avocado. Quick Pasta: pasta + ground beef/turkey/chicken + tomato sauce. Burrito Bowl: rice + beef/chicken/beans + cheese + corn + salsa + avocado. Breakfast-for-Dinner: eggs + toast + hash browns + fruit + yogurt.

THE 5-MINUTE FOOD PLAN

Breakfast: bagel + peanut/seed butter + banana + milk. Before practice: banana + granola bar. After practice: chocolate milk + banana. Dinner: rotisserie chicken + microwave rice + frozen vegetables. Meet: bagel + banana + yogurt + pretzels + sandwich.

GROCERY LIST

Carbohydrates: bagels, bread, oatmeal, cereal, pasta, rice, potatoes, tortillas, granola bars, pretzels, crackers. Protein: eggs, chicken, turkey, Greek yogurt, cheese, milk, beans, hummus, peanut/seed butter. Fruit: bananas, apples, berries, grapes, oranges, applesauce. Easy extras: granola, trail mix, chocolate milk, frozen fruit, frozen vegetables.

MEET-DAY PACKING LIST

Water bottle; extra water; 2–3 fruits; bagel; granola bars; pretzels/crackers; yogurt or cheese; sandwich/wrap; lunch for long meets; extra snacks; cooler/ice pack if needed; familiar drink options.

PIZZA COUNTS

Pizza can absolutely be part of a swimmer's diet. Pizza + fruit + milk/water is a reasonable family meal. The goal is the overall pattern—not perfection.

BODY IMAGE & RED-S

The goal is not to make a swimmer as light, lean or thin as possible. The goal is enough energy to grow, train, recover, stay healthy and perform. RED-S can occur when an athlete consistently does not consume enough energy to support growth, daily life and training. Warning signs can include persistent fatigue, declining performance, frequent injuries, poor recovery, significant eating changes, excessive concern about weight/body shape, or significant menstrual changes.

SUPPLEMENTS: FOOD FIRST

Young swimmers generally do not need fat burners, pre-workout, energy drinks, detox products, weight-loss products, carb-restricting diets, huge amounts of protein, protein powder simply because they swim, or supplements marketed as performance boosters. Discuss supplements with a qualified healthcare professional before use.

THE BREAKERS FIVE

1. Don't skip meals. 2. Carbs are fuel. 3. Protein supports recovery. 4. Water first. 5. Let them grow.

DISCLAIMER

This handout is general nutrition education for Breakers Swim Team families and is not individualized medical or nutrition advice. General principles are consistent with guidance from Health Canada, the American Academy of Pediatrics/HealthyChildren.org and sports nutrition guidance from the American College of Sports Medicine. Consult a qualified healthcare professional for individualized advice.

EASY FOOD IDEAS & PARENT TIPS

The goal is not to make every meal perfect. The goal is to make it easy for a growing swimmer to get enough food, enough fuel and enough recovery day after day.

WHAT TO KEEP ON HAND

- Bagels, bread, tortillas, oatmeal, cereal, pasta, rice, potatoes and crackers.
- Eggs, chicken, turkey, fish, cheese, milk, yogurt, beans, hummus and peanut or seed butter.
- Bananas, apples, berries, grapes, oranges and applesauce.
- Granola bars, pretzels, trail mix, frozen fruit and frozen vegetables.
- Easy leftovers that can become the next day's lunch or post-practice meal.

5-MINUTE BREAKFASTS

- Bagel + peanut or seed butter + banana + milk.
- Oatmeal made with milk + banana + peanut or seed butter.
- Cereal + milk + banana or berries.
- Toast + eggs + fruit.
- Greek yogurt + granola + berries.
- Overnight oats prepared the night before.

5-MINUTE PRE-PRACTICE SNACKS

- Banana.
- Applesauce.
- Granola bar.
- Half a bagel.
- Toast with peanut or seed butter.
- Pretzels or crackers.
- Yogurt and fruit.
- Small bowl of cereal and milk.

Tip: If practice starts soon after school, the after-school snack is often more important than trying to squeeze in a large meal immediately before swimming.

5-MINUTE RECOVERY FOODS

- Chocolate milk + banana.
- Yogurt + granola + fruit.
- Turkey and cheese sandwich + fruit.
- Peanut or seed butter toast + milk.
- Cheese + crackers + apple.
- Smoothie made with milk or yogurt + fruit.
- Leftovers from dinner.

Tip: Recovery food does not need to be a special sports product. A normal food containing carbohydrate and protein is often enough.

EASY DINNERS FOR BUSY SWIM FAMILIES

- Rotisserie chicken + microwave rice + frozen vegetables.
- Pasta + tomato sauce + ground beef, turkey or lentils.
- Chicken quesadillas + fruit + yogurt.
- Chicken or beef rice bowls with vegetables and avocado.

- Burrito bowls with rice, beans or meat, cheese, corn, salsa and avocado.
- Eggs + toast + hash browns + fruit for breakfast-for-dinner.
- Sandwiches or wraps + soup + fruit when time is tight.

SIMPLE SWIMMER RECIPES

Swimmer Breakfast Bowl

Ingredients: Oatmeal, milk, banana or berries, peanut/seed butter and granola.

How: Cook oatmeal with milk. Add fruit, nut/seed butter and granola.

Breakfast Bagel

Ingredients: Bagel, peanut/seed butter or cream cheese, fruit and milk. Optional egg and cheese.

How: Build the bagel and serve with fruit and milk.

Overnight Oats

Ingredients: Oats, milk, yogurt, banana or berries, peanut/seed butter and optional honey.

How: Mix in a container and refrigerate overnight.

Swimmer Smoothie

Ingredients: Milk, yogurt, banana, frozen berries, peanut/seed butter and optional oats.

How: Blend until smooth. Add more milk if needed.

Banana Peanut Butter Roll-Up

Ingredients: Tortilla, peanut/seed butter and banana.

How: Spread, add banana and roll.

Homemade Energy Bites

Ingredients: Oats, peanut/seed butter, honey, mini chocolate chips and ground flax or coconut.

How: Mix and roll into small balls. Refrigerate.

Turkey and Cheese Quesadilla

Ingredients: Tortilla, cheese, turkey and optional peppers.

How: Fold and cook in a pan until the cheese melts.

Chicken Rice Bowl

Ingredients: Rice, chicken, corn, cucumber, carrots, avocado and a preferred sauce.

How: Build a bowl and let each family member choose toppings.

Quick Pasta

Ingredients: Pasta, ground beef/turkey/chicken, tomato sauce, optional vegetables and parmesan.

How: Cook pasta and protein, add sauce and combine.

Burrito Bowl

Ingredients: Rice, beef/chicken/beans, cheese, corn, salsa, avocado and lettuce.

How: Build a bowl from the ingredients.

Breakfast-for-Dinner

Ingredients: Eggs, toast, hash browns, fruit and yogurt.

How: Cook and serve together.

MEET DAY FOOD TIPS

The best meet-day foods are foods your swimmer already knows and tolerates well. Meet day is not the time to test a new supplement, giant breakfast or unfamiliar meal.

BEFORE THE FIRST RACE

- Eat a familiar breakfast 2–4 hours before the first race when possible.
- Examples: oatmeal + banana + milk; bagel + peanut/seed butter + fruit; cereal + milk + banana; toast + eggs + fruit; yogurt + granola + fruit.
- If there is very little time, choose a smaller familiar snack and plan to eat more later.

BETWEEN RACES

- Think small and frequent rather than one large meal.
- Good choices include bananas, applesauce, pretzels, crackers, granola bars, bagels, fruit, cereal, yogurt and sandwiches or wraps.
- Bring more food than you think you will need for a long meet.
- Keep the food familiar and easy to digest.

LONG OR MULTI-SESSION MEETS

- Pack a real lunch or substantial meal between sessions.
- Continue drinking regularly.
- Include carbohydrate foods throughout the day.
- Add protein-containing foods around meals and snacks.
- A sports drink can be useful during prolonged or particularly intense competition when extra carbohydrate and electrolytes are needed.

WHAT TO PACK IN THE MEET BAG

- Full water bottle.
- Bananas and other easy fruit.
- Applesauce.
- Bagel or bread.
- Granola bars.
- Pretzels or crackers.
- Yogurt or cheese if a cooler is available.
- Sandwich or wrap.
- Lunch for a long meet.
- Extra snacks.
- Cooler and ice pack when needed.

PARENT TIPS THAT MAKE THIS EASIER

- Pack the snack before leaving home. Hungry swimmers make poor snack planners.
- Keep two or three easy foods available at home at all times.
- Cook extra at dinner so tomorrow's lunch or recovery meal is already done.
- Use convenience foods when they save time. Frozen vegetables, microwave rice, rotisserie chicken and prepared yogurt are perfectly reasonable.
- Let your swimmer help choose foods and pack their own meet bag as they get older.
- Do not turn food into a reward or punishment.
- Avoid commenting on a swimmer's body size or shape.
- If a swimmer is consistently hungry, increase food rather than automatically restricting snacks.

PIZZA, FAST FOOD AND REAL LIFE

Pizza, burgers, fries, birthday cake, ice cream and restaurant meals can all fit into a swimmer's overall diet. One meal does not determine performance or health. Aim for a balanced pattern most of the time and avoid creating fear around normal foods.

THE SUNDAY 30-MINUTE PREP

- Cook a batch of rice or pasta.
- Cook or buy easy chicken or another protein.
- Wash fruit.
- Cut a few vegetables.
- Hard-boil eggs.
- Make overnight oats.
- Make energy bites.
- Portion pretzels, crackers or granola bars.
- Put grab-and-go foods where swimmers can actually see them.

WHEN A SWIMMER SAYS, 'I'M STARVING AFTER PRACTICE'

Believe them first. Growth and training can create a large appetite. Offer a recovery snack right away if dinner is not ready, then serve the normal family meal when it is available.