



FUELING YOUNG SWIMMERS

A practical nutrition guide for parents of 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 needs to support the whole person.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO KNOW

A 9-year-old swimmer and a 16-year-old swimmer can have very different nutritional needs. Needs change with age, growth, puberty, training volume, intensity, appetite and recovery. There is no single “swimmer diet.” The goal is consistent fueling that supports health, growth and performance.

APPETITE IS INFORMATION.

Growth spurts and heavy training can increase appetite dramatically. A hungry swimmer is not necessarily overeating.

THE FOUR JOBS OF FOOD

CARBOHYDRATES = FUEL

Bread • Bagels • Oatmeal • Rice • Pasta • Potatoes • Fruit • Milk • Yogurt

PROTEIN = BUILD + REPAIR

Eggs • Chicken • Fish • Milk • Yogurt • Cheese • Beans • Lentils • Tofu

FATS = SUPPORT

Avocado • Nuts • Seeds • Nut butter • Olive oil • Hummus • Fish

FLUID = HYDRATION

Water is the everyday drink of choice. Swimmers sweat too—even in the pool.

THE DAILY FORMULA

3 MEALS + REGULAR SNACKS. At meals, think carbohydrate + protein + fruit/vegetable + healthy fat.

TRAINING DAY NUTRITION

The goal is to arrive at practice fueled, train well and recover afterwards.

SCHOOL → PRACTICE

Lunch may be at noon while practice doesn't start until late afternoon. Pack an after-school snack so your swimmer doesn't arrive at practice starving.

- Banana + granola bar
- Yogurt + granola
- Peanut butter toast
- Crackers + cheese
- Sandwich

- Apple + cheese
- Half a bagel
- Cereal + milk
- Fruit + yogurt
- Smoothie

BEFORE PRACTICE

2–4 HOURS BEFORE: Normal meal with carbohydrate, some protein and fluids. Examples: chicken + rice; pasta + meat sauce; sandwich + fruit + yogurt; eggs + toast + fruit; burrito + fruit; oatmeal + milk + banana.

30–90 MINUTES BEFORE: If hungry or it has been a while since eating, choose a smaller familiar snack: banana, applesauce, granola bar, toast, half a bagel, cereal, yogurt, crackers or fruit.

EARLY-MORNING PRACTICE

If a full breakfast is difficult before an early practice, try something small—banana, toast, applesauce, half a bagel, cereal, yogurt or milk—then eat a proper breakfast afterwards.

DURING REGULAR PRACTICE

Water first. For shorter or moderate practices, water is generally appropriate. During prolonged, particularly intense or high-volume training, additional carbohydrate and electrolytes may sometimes be useful.

EVERY SWIMMER SHOULD BRING A FULL WATER BOTTLE.

AFTER PRACTICE

CARBOHYDRATE + PROTEIN + FLUID. Real food works.

- Chocolate milk + banana
- Turkey sandwich + fruit
- Peanut butter toast + milk
- Leftovers from dinner

- Greek yogurt + granola + fruit
- Cheese + crackers + apple
- Smoothie with milk/yogurt + fruit
- Yogurt + fruit

A REALISTIC 2-HOUR PRACTICE DAY

7:00 AM Breakfast	Oatmeal + banana + milk
12:00 PM Lunch	Chicken sandwich + fruit + yogurt
3:30 PM Snack	Granola bar + banana + water
4:30–6:30 PM Practice	Water
6:45 PM Recovery	Chocolate milk + fruit
7:30 PM Dinner	Chicken + rice + vegetables
9:00 PM If hungry	Yogurt + granola

Example only—not a prescription. Every swimmer has different needs.

MEET-DAY NUTRITION

THE GOLDEN RULE: DON'T TRY SOMETHING NEW ON MEET DAY.

Meet nutrition should be familiar. The goal is enough fuel to compete without feeling overly full.

THE DAY BEFORE

Eat normally. Include carbohydrate foods such as rice, pasta, potatoes, bread, cereal, oatmeal and fruit. Drink regularly and prioritize sleep. Extreme carbohydrate loading is generally not necessary for a typical youth swim meet.

MEET MORNING

Keep breakfast familiar. Examples: oatmeal + banana + milk; bagel + peanut butter + fruit; cereal + milk + banana; toast + eggs + fruit; yogurt + granola + fruit. For very early meets, a smaller snack may be easier before the first race, followed by more breakfast later.

BETWEEN RACES

SMALL + FREQUENT. Don't wait until your swimmer is starving.

- | | |
|---------------|------------------|
| ■ Banana | ■ Applesauce |
| ■ Pretzels | ■ Crackers |
| ■ Granola bar | ■ Bagel |
| ■ Fruit | ■ Cereal |
| ■ Yogurt | ■ Sandwich |
| ■ Wrap | ■ Chocolate milk |

LONG OR MULTI-SESSION MEETS

A full-day meet requires planning. Pack enough food—and pack more than you expect your swimmer to eat. Carbohydrates: bagels, pretzels, crackers, granola bars, cereal, fruit, applesauce, rice cakes. Protein: yogurt, cheese, sandwich/wrap, nuts or nut butter where appropriate. Fluids: water; a sports drink may be useful when prolonged or particularly intense competition creates a need for additional carbohydrate and electrolytes.

WHAT NOT TO DO BEFORE A MEET

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| ■ Skip breakfast | ■ Arrive dehydrated |
| ■ Try a new food | ■ Eat a huge meal immediately before racing |
| ■ Rely entirely on candy | ■ Use energy drinks |
| ■ Experiment with supplements | ■ Restrict food because of body weight |

SPORTS DRINKS

WATER: Best choice for regular hydration and most ordinary training.

SPORTS DRINK: May be useful when prolonged or intense training/competition creates a need for additional carbohydrate and electrolytes.

ENERGY DRINK: Not the same thing. Energy drinks often contain caffeine/stimulants and should not be used as a performance strategy for young swimmers.

TRAVELING TO A MEET

Plan ahead. Pack familiar foods. Simple restaurant meals are fine: pasta + chicken, rice bowl + protein, sandwich + soup + fruit, chicken + potatoes + vegetables, or pizza + salad/fruit.

PARENTS' GUIDE: GROWTH, PUBERTY & WELL-BEING

LET THEM GROW.

Puberty happens at different ages and speeds. A swimmer's body is supposed to change. Growth, muscle development, body-fat changes and increased appetite can all be normal parts of development.

BOYS DURING PUBERTY

Boys may experience significant increases in height, muscle development, appetite and energy requirements. Keep convenient, nutritious foods available: milk, yogurt, eggs, sandwiches, bagels, fruit, oatmeal, cheese, nuts/nut butter, rice, pasta and leftovers.

GIRLS DURING PUBERTY

Girls experience major changes in growth, hormones and bone development. Once menstruation begins, iron needs increase. Food sources include lean red meat, eggs, fish, beans, lentils, tofu, nuts and seeds, whole grains and dark green vegetables. Persistent fatigue or reduced endurance should be discussed with a healthcare professional.

BONE HEALTH

Childhood and adolescence are important years for building bone. Calcium and vitamin D are particularly important. Good calcium sources include milk, yogurt, cheese, fortified soy beverages and calcium-set tofu.

VEGETARIAN & VEGAN SWIMMERS

Vegetarian and vegan swimmers can fuel competitive swimming successfully. Pay particular attention to adequate overall energy, protein, iron, calcium, vitamin B12 and vitamin D. Individual advice from a registered dietitian can be helpful.

SWIMMERS' BODIES CHANGE.

Try to avoid comments about whether a swimmer looks "skinny," "heavy," "lean," "bigger" or "smaller." Instead ask: "How do you feel?" "Do you have energy?" "Are you recovering?" "Are you enjoying swimming?"

RED-S: RELATIVE ENERGY DEFICIENCY IN SPORT

RED-S can occur when an athlete consistently doesn't consume enough energy to support growth, daily life and training. It can affect boys and girls and may contribute to persistent fatigue, poor recovery, declining performance, increased injury risk and bone-health problems.

WHEN SHOULD PARENTS GET HELP?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ■ Persistent fatigue | ■ Declining performance |
| ■ Frequent injuries | ■ Poor recovery |
| ■ Persistent hunger | ■ Mood changes |
| ■ Difficulty concentrating | ■ Feeling cold frequently |
| ■ Significant changes in eating | ■ Skipping meals |
| ■ Excessive concern about weight/body shape | ■ Significant menstrual changes, when applicable |

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 MEET-DAY CHECKLIST

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ■ Breakfast eaten | ■ Water bottle filled |
| ■ Extra water packed | ■ Meet snacks packed |
| ■ Lunch/meal packed for long meets | ■ Familiar foods |
| ■ Cooler/ice pack if needed | ■ Carbohydrate snacks |
| ■ Protein snack | ■ Appropriate drink options |

THE 5 BREAKERS NUTRITION RULES

1. DON'T SKIP MEALS.	2. CARBS ARE FUEL.	3. PROTEIN SUPPORTS RECOVERY.
4. WATER FIRST.	5. LET THEM GROW.	GOAL: Energy • Strength • Growth • Recovery • Health • Performance

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Provide food regularly. Offer variety. Pack snacks. Encourage hydration. Support recovery. Avoid unnecessary dieting or food restriction. Allow your swimmer to listen to hunger and fullness. Talk to a healthcare professional when something doesn't seem right. Families provide the opportunity to fuel; swimmers gradually learn to recognize and respond to their own hunger, fullness and training needs.

NUTRITION DISCLAIMER

This handout is intended for general nutrition education for Breakers Swim Team families and is not individualized medical or nutrition advice. Parents should consult their family physician, pediatrician, registered dietitian or other qualified healthcare professional for individualized advice, particularly regarding growth and development, persistent fatigue, iron status, menstrual health, bone health, food allergies, dietary restrictions, eating concerns, supplements or medical conditions.

SOURCES

Health Canada — Canada's Food Guide and nutrition considerations for children and adolescents; American Academy of Pediatrics / HealthyChildren.org — sports nutrition, hydration and performance-enhancing substances; American College of Sports Medicine — nutrition and hydration guidance for young athletes. This resource is educational and should not replace individualized medical or nutrition care.