

The Importance of the Pre-Game Meal for Volleyball Players

On the day of a match, be sure to eat breakfast, lunch and a couple of snacks during the day. Stick with lean meats, vegetables and carbohydrates like bread, pasta and fruit. Stay away from foods with high processed sugar and any new foods you have not tried before on game days.

The most important meal of the day is your pre-game meal. This is what your body will primarily draw from during a match, so choose your foods wisely. The goals are to top up your energy stores to ensure plenty for competition and to leave you feeling neither too hungry nor too full.

Most experts agree that the Pre-Game Meal should be eaten 2-3 hours before your match. If you're not sure what your ideal time is for pre-game, try eating two and a half hours before the match and then vary the time slightly for the subsequent matches, paying close attention to how your body responds.

Since volleyball requires a lot of quick movement and bursts of strength over a long period of time, it is necessary to provide your body with a good amount of carbohydrates. Supplement your carbo-load with protein and veggies and you have the ideal pre-game meal.

The recommended ratio is

- 50-65% carbs (fruits, veggies, whole grain cereal/bread/pasta),
- 10-25% protein (low fat dairy, lean meats, chicken, turkey, fish, low fat cheese and egg whites) and
- less than 30% healthy fats (nuts, nut butters, avocado, soy, and vegetable oil based salad dressings).

Two or three hours before an event

- Drink healthy beverages, such as water, sports drinks, juices, and low-fat milk, to maximize hydration.
- Eat easily digested carbohydrate-rich foods, like fruit, bagels, crackers, rice cakes, pretzels, breadsticks, bread with jam or jelly, cold or hot cereal, flour tortillas, and rice. Small amounts of protein are also tolerated, such as low-fat or drinkable yogurt or a modest amount of peanut butter.
- Wait until after the competition to eat whole grains and other high fiber foods. Fiber adds bulk and typically slows the exit of food from the stomach, increasing the chance of digestive problems during exercise.
- Drink plenty of fluid along with any energy bars consumed. Energy bars are very dense and require adequate fluid to speed their digestion and travel through the digestive system.

One hour before an event

- Drink water. Train athletes to keep a personable water bottle by their side at all times and sip to match their thirst level.
- Maintain muscle and liver glycogen levels with liquid carbohydrates by sipping sports drinks.
- Eat fruits like oranges, grapes, peaches, pears, and chunks of melon. These fruits are mostly carbohydrate and water, and they digest quickly.
- Limit solid foods. The more solid foods eaten, the longer it takes to digest. Being nervous, excited, or over-heated further slows digestion.

Below are suggested meals and snacks for game days:

Tournament Foods (for in-between matches)

- Energy bars
- Low-salt pretzels
- Fruits (strawberries, blueberries, apples, oranges, grapes, bananas, apples)
- Veggies (carrots, celery, broccoli, leafy greens, etc)
- Yogurt
- Trail-mix
- Minibagels
- Granola bars
- Animal crackers
- Make sure to hydrate with water and supplement with sports drinks if desired.

Pre-Game Meals (2-3 hours before games)

- Sandwiches (lean meats only) – turkey, grilled chicken, or fish
- Chicken tacos with flour tortillas (no hard shell) and rice (no beans)
- Cereals (cold or hot) with low-fat milk
- Peanut butter sandwiches on wheat bread
- Pancakes, syrup and fruit
- Whole wheat pasta with low fat sauces
- Smoothie (fruit and low fat yogurt)
- Fruit
- Baked potatoes with low fat fillings
- Bagels
- Crackers
- Rice cakes
- Pretzels
- Breadsticks
- Bread with jam or jelly
- Brown rice
- Low-fat or drinkable yogurt

No-no's

- Burgers
- Pizza
- Fried foods
- Desert pastries
- Cookies
- **Please save deserts for after the matches.