

# Arizona Dolphins- A SWIMMER'S LIFESTYLE



## Nutrition & Diet

### How should a swimmer eat?

**DID YOU KNOW:** According to wellness coordinator Brigette Peterson's research in sports nutrition, competitive swimmers can burn up to 5,000 calories in four hours, depending on the intensity of the workout, ultimately revealing that swimmers can burn up to about 40% of their daily energy DURING practice times. So, it is undeniable that swimming requires ENORMOUS amounts of energy. But where do we get this energy from? FOOD! So, the energy demand on swimmers can only attest to how important it is that WHAT you're putting into your bodies matters.

First, let me start off by saying that nutrition in young swimmers is NO JOKE! Most of the day, they are hungry. But when it comes to long school days then straight to practice, oftentimes, the kids don't have the time to get in the right snack before training.

### So, the biggest issues I see with swimmers at practices are:

- 1) They are showing up to practice and have eaten a little too much or too soon before hopping in the water. This leaves them either nauseous or lethargic while their body tries to digest the food
- 2) They have not eaten anything before practice for fear of feeling sick or "heavy" in the water. This leaves their motor running on empty with no energy source to get through the practice, oftentimes crashing mid-practice.
- 3) They are not snacking or eating the RIGHT things before and after practice.

But to understand what your swimmer needs and when, we have to go back to the basics. And that brings us to: CARBOHYDRATES!

### Why do we need carbohydrates?

They are a fundamental energy source, not just for our body and muscles, but for our BRAINS! Depending on the carb you eat, and the time of the day, it is then stored in our tissues as glycogen. Then later in the day, when you need fuel for movement and/or exercise, that glycogen gets broken down by the body to form ATP (i.e. ENERGY).

### Three main types of carbohydrates:

- Sugars: They are also called SIMPLE carbohydrates because they are in the most basic form. They can be added to foods, such as the sugar in candy, desserts, processed foods, and regular soda. They also include the kinds of sugar that are found naturally in fruits, vegetables, and milk.
- Starches: They are COMPLEX carbohydrates, which are made of lots of simple sugars strung together. Your body needs time to break down starches into sugars to use them for energy. Starches include bread, cereal, and pasta. They also include certain vegetables, like potatoes, peas, and corn.
- Fiber: It is also a COMPLEX carbohydrate. Your body cannot break down most fibers, so eating foods with fiber can help you feel full and make you less likely to overeat. Diets high in fiber have other health benefits. They may help prevent stomach or intestinal

problems, such as constipation. They may also help lower cholesterol and blood sugar. Fiber is found in many foods that come from plants, including fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans, and whole grains.

*So, you could be wondering, WHEN is the best time to eat WHICH carbohydrate?*

When it comes to athletes, a good rule of thumb is simple carbs BEFORE your workouts and complex carbs AFTER. Simple carbs like your fruits (often paired with a granola/nut bar to help suppress hunger THROUGHOUT a two-hour practice) allow those simple sugars to be broken down quickly and used as fast-releasing energy during your practices. Your complex carbs are best utilized AFTER practice and usually during your bigger meals like dinner. Your complex carbs assist in [protein synthesis](#) so make sure when you have that brown rice on the plate, make sure there is a BIG source of protein to go with it.

*Why is protein important?*

Protein not only helps to build muscle, but it also helps stabilize our blood sugar and in turn keeps energy and endurance steady throughout the day. Protein is also a critical nutritional component of muscle repair and should be eaten AFTER a workout to aid in this RECOVERY process (*SUPER IMPORTANT*: WITHIN 30-45 minutes after practice). If swimmers aren't getting enough protein in their training diets, their muscles may not recover properly which can lead to premature injuries and strains. So, my "go-to" would be **20-30 grams of protein within 30-45 minutes of practice.**

*HOW should your swimmers eat?*

According to natural health and fitness expert Brue Baker, swimmers who are training intensely for more than two hours daily should eat four to seven light meals per day. Eating large meals or too much in one sitting can leave your swimmer feeling lethargic and "heavy" and will inhibit their performance ([The Importance of a Swimmer's Nutrition](#)).

*A few of Coach Tayla's tips when it comes to nutrition and healthy eating:*

- 1) Staying hydrated. Sometimes water just isn't enough and your body is lacking its natural potassium, magnesium, and salts. Sometimes coconut water is the perfect way to take the edge off when fatigue and/or cramping start to set in.
- 2) Always try to have a colorful plate when eating your bigger meals. And by colors, I am not talking about smarties or skittles. I am referring to fruits and veggies to brighten up your plate.
- 3) Keep things simple and by simple, I mean natural. There are countless studies on processed food and the affects it has on [nutrition absorption](#). Basically put, the more your food is processed, the harder it is for your body to absorb vital nutrients and minerals it needs to function correctly.
- 4) Snack, all the time. It doesn't need to be big snacks. But a banana, a handful of nuts, an apple and some peanut butter or even some hummus and celery can go a long way or a tablespoon of yoghurt.
- 5) My favorite and most valuable tip: PLAN AHEAD! If you know your kid is going to have a long day at school and goes straight to practice afterwards, make sure you or your swimmer packs extra food that day. Oftentimes, those snacks don't go bad, so if they don't happen to eat it on the day, save them for another day!
- 6) Stay consistent with your meal plan between practices and swim meets. The body gets used to burning fuel a certain way and if you mix that up during a big meet, the swimmer could end up more lethargic during competition.

## A SWIMMER'S CHEAT SHEET:

### BEFORE PRACTICE



### DURING PRACTICE



### AFTER PRACTICE

