

Let's talk about food.

Our second home meet is coming up this weekend, and I want our kids stepping up to the blocks *fueled*, not running on fumes or living off one muffin and a Gatorade.

This isn't about "eating clean" or looking a certain way. It's about having enough energy to race hard, recover between events, stay healthy, and actually enjoy the sport.

Last year's nutrition talk featured sports dietitian Anna Turner, who walked us through what an "athlete plate" should look like and some big mistakes high school athletes make, such as skipping breakfast, going hours without eating, and not fueling during long practices.

That stuck with me, because I've been on the other side of this.

A quick note about my own story

In college, I struggled with body image and food. I thought "eating less" would automatically mean "swimming faster." I skipped meals, cut out whole food groups, and spent way too much mental energy worrying about what my body looked like instead of what it could *do*.

In the short term, I sometimes looked "fit" in pictures. Long term, I was exhausted, cranky, sore all the time, and constantly frustrated with my times. I didn't understand that I was asking my body to do college-level training on middle-school-level fuel.

I'm sharing that because:

- Restriction is sneaky.
- It can hide behind "just trying to be healthy" or "I'm not that hungry."
- It absolutely shows up on the stopwatch and in how kids feel in the water.

So if this feels a little personal, it is. I care about this a lot because I've lived the opposite.

What "eating like a swimmer" should look like most days

Anna used a simple "athlete plate" idea that I love:

Every meal should mostly include:

- Carbohydrates: main fuel (bread, rice, pasta, potatoes, tortillas, fruit, cereals, crackers).
- Protein: builds and repairs muscle (chicken, beef, eggs, Greek yogurt, cheese, milk, deli meat, beans, tofu).
- Color: fruits and veggies for vitamins and minerals.
- Healthy fats: smaller amount (olive oil, avocado, nuts/seeds, peanut butter, etc.).

On normal training days, think:

- Breakfast: carbs + protein + color
 - Example: toast with peanut butter, scrambled eggs, fruit, and milk.
- Lunch: bigger meal, not just a "snack lunch"

- Example: turkey/cheese sandwich, pretzels, baby carrots, apple, water.
- After-school pre-practice snack (60–90 min before):
 - Example: granola bar + banana, yogurt + crackers, or peanut butter on a bagel.
- During long practices (90+ minutes):
 - Small carb source: sports drink, applesauce pouch, fruit snacks, chews, or half a bar to keep energy up.
- Post-practice (within 30–60 min):
 - Example: chocolate milk and a granola bar, or Greek yogurt with fruit and some cereal.
- Dinner: More carbs, good protein, some color.

The pattern is easy: eat every 3–4 hours, don't go all day on fumes, and don't let practice be the first real fuel your body sees.

Meet weekend fuel: big picture

On meet weekends, the goals are:

1. Top off energy stores (carbs) the day before and between sessions.
2. Stay hydrated without feeling sloshy.
3. Keep things familiar; this is not the day to try ghost pepper wings and a mystery energy drink.
4. Recover between sessions, so your 4th event Sunday still looks like your 1st event Friday.

Below are some example timelines you can copy and tweak.

Scenario 1: Racing Friday night & Saturday morning

Friday – school day & evening session

Morning at school

- Breakfast: normal swimmer breakfast (ex: cereal + milk + banana, or toast, eggs, and fruit).
- Snack mid-morning: granola bar, fruit, or yogurt.
- Lunch: full meal with carbs + protein + color.
 - Example: pasta with meat sauce, salad or veggies, fruit, and water.

After school (2–3 hours before warm-ups)

- “Mini dinner” or hearty snack:
 - Turkey/cheese sandwich, pretzels, fruit.
 - Or rice bowl with chicken and veggies.
 - Water or a small sports drink.

60–30 minutes before first event

- Light carb snack only (easy to digest):
 - Applesauce pouch, banana, fig bar, fruit snacks, or crackers.
 - Sip water or sports drink.

Between events

- Nibble, don't feast:
 - Fruit, granola bar, pretzels, dry cereal, applesauce.

- Sip sports drink or water, especially if they're doing multiple events or longer swims.

After Friday night session

- Within 30–60 minutes:
 - Recovery snack: chocolate milk + granola bar, yogurt + fruit, or a PB&J.
- Then a real dinner when you get home:
 - Pasta with chicken and veggies, rice and stir-fry, or tacos with rice/beans.

Goal: go to bed **fed**, not starving and not stuffed.

Saturday morning session

If warm-ups are early, breakfast will feel early too, but it still matters.

2–3 hours before warm-ups

- Light but real breakfast:
 - Bagel with cream cheese or peanut butter + banana.
 - Or oatmeal with fruit and a glass of milk.
- Water.

60–30 minutes before

- Small carb booster: fruit snacks, half a granola bar, applesauce squeeze.

During the session

- Same as Friday: small bites of carbs + steady fluids between events.

After session

- Recovery snack within an hour, then a bigger lunch once you're home.

If there's *another* session later that day, treat the time in between like a refueling window: lunch, fluids, maybe a short nap, then repeat pre-meet snack pattern.

Scenario 2: Racing Saturday afternoon & Sunday afternoon

The danger with afternoon sessions is kids sleeping in, grazing, and then showing up under-fueled.

Saturday (afternoon session)

Morning

- Normal breakfast: pancakes/waffles with fruit, or eggs + toast + fruit.
- Late-morning snack: yogurt, granola bar, or fruit.

Lunch (3–4 hours before warm-ups)

- Balanced meal with carbs, protein, and color:
 - Turkey wrap, chips, fruit, veggies.
 - Or leftover pasta with chicken and veggies.

90–60 minutes before

- Light carb snack: banana, applesauce, crackers, or a bar.

During/after session

- Same pattern: small carbs + fluids between events.
- Post-meet snack, then a solid dinner.

Sunday (afternoon session)

Repeat Saturday's pattern. This is usually when fatigue + poor sleep + "I'm over it" food choices show up, so Sunday is actually where fueling *really* matters.

Encourage swimmers to:

- Hydrate with water at home in the morning.
- Eat consistent meals, not just “meet snacks” all day.
- Still grab that recovery snack after their last race—even if they “just want ice cream.”

What about “good” and “bad” meet foods?

I’m not banning anything, but some choices *help* racing more than others.

Helpful meet foods

- Carbs: bananas, applesauce pouches, fruit snacks, pretzels, crackers, granola bars, dry cereal, fig bars, bagels.
- Protein for recovery: chocolate milk, Greek yogurt, cheese sticks, turkey sandwiches, peanut butter.
- Hydration: water, sports drink.

Less helpful right before races

- Super greasy foods (burgers, fries, pizza dripping in cheese) can feel heavy and slow to digest.
- Giant sugary drinks or energy drinks, a blood sugar rollercoaster, and potential jitters.
- Big, high-fat meals between sessions sit in the stomach and make the water feel like cement.

These foods aren’t evil; they’re just better saved for after the session, not 20 minutes before a 200 IM.

Warning signs that a swimmer might not be eating enough

Underfueling doesn’t show up as just “being tired.” They can affect growth, hormones, bones, mood, and performance.

Things to watch for:

- Constant fatigue: always exhausted, dragging through practice, needing naps after school every day.
- Frequent injuries or nagging soreness: stress fractures, shin pain, things that don’t heal like they should.
- Feeling cold all the time, even when others aren’t.
- Big mood swings: irritable, anxious, or unusually down.
- Food and body are becoming a big obsession: lots of talk about “good vs bad” foods, calories, or “earning” food by how hard they swam.
- Skipping meals or snacks on purpose.
- Nighttime raids of the kitchen: going all day, hardly eating, then being ravenous at night and feeling out of control.
- For girls: periods becoming very light, irregular, or disappearing altogether (that’s a health red flag, not a “perk” of training).

If any of this sounds familiar, this is not about blame. It’s a sign to check in and possibly pull in help, a doctor, a sports dietitian, and yes, you can always loop me in to.

How parents can help

- Keep easy carbs and proteins in the house (granola bars, fruit, yogurt, cheese sticks, sandwich stuff).
- Help kids pack snacks and water bottles for school and meets so they're not relying on vending machines.
- Notice patterns, not one-off days. Everyone has "off" nutrition days. We're looking for trends.
- Talk about food as fuel and care, not as something they have to "deserve."

Final thoughts before this weekend

If you made it this far, thank you. I know this is a lot, but it all boils down to a simple checklist:

- Did you eat breakfast?
- Have you gone more than 3–4 hours without food?
- Do your meals have carbs, protein, and color?
- Do you have snacks and a water bottle in your bag for meet day?

If the answer is mostly "yes," you're already ahead of the game.

I want our swimmers walking into this second home meet feeling confident because they trained hard and took care of their bodies.

If you have questions or your swimmer is struggling with food or body image, please reach out. I'm always happy to help, and we can connect you with a professional if needed.

See you at the pool!

Coach Brynna