

There are some crazy ideas out there about carbohydrate intake and swimming. I've heard everything from "carbohydrate is not needed to fuel swimming" and "carbs only make you fat" to "carbohydrate-rich foods should never be eaten after lunch, or dinner, or after 8 p.m." For the record, all of those statements are false.

Carbohydrate is the primary fuel for active muscles. Without adequate carbohydrate in your daily diet, you will find it hard to sustain hard training, and the outcome can be poor performance during a meet. To be sure, there are some carbohydrate-rich foods that are healthier than others and some foods we classify as carbohydrates are higher in fat than carbs (pastries, doughnuts, and biscuits to name a few).

Sports nutritionists try to educate swimmers to have enough carbohydrate availability to support daily training. The amount of carbohydrate you need changes as your training and competition schedule changes. During moderate- to high-intensity training for 1 to 3 hours/day, aim for 2.7-4.5 grams of carbohydrate per pound of body weight. On low volume training days or rest days, decrease carb intake to 2.3-3.1 grams per pound. Spread your carbohydrate intake over the entire day to make sure carbohydrate is available for training sessions.

Try these quality carbs to fuel your muscles and your brain (your brain's preferred fuel is the carbohydrate, glucose).

- Fresh fruit of any kind is mostly simple sugar, but that sugar is diluted with water and also contains vitamins and minerals. Choose in-season fruits for the best taste and price. Winter fruits include citrus (oranges, tangerines mandarins, and grapefruit) and pears, kiwifruit and dates. When drinking juice, look for 100% fruit juice versus fruit drinks that are higher in added sugars.
- Veggies of all kinds. Salad greens to starchy white and sweet potatoes are healthy carbohydrates. A baked white or sweet potato will be healthier than fries or chips (yes, sweet potato fries may sound healthier, but are comparable to fried white potatoes). And, if your broccoli contains more cheese sauce than vegetable, you might reconsider the sauce.
- Whole grains like brown or wild rice, whole wheat bread and pasta, and hot and cold cereals can help you meet your carbohydrate needs. While we encourage whole grains, you only need to make half of your grains whole, so if you don't like brown rice, white rice is OK and is better than fried rice.

Dairy foods may be thought of as a high protein food, but milk and yogurt also contain a less sweet carbohydrate, lactose, so a glass of milk or a carton of yogurt provides quality carbs along with protein, vitamins and minerals.

- Other quality carbs include dried and frozen fruits, frozen fruit bars, fruit or yogurt smoothies, vegetable juices, canned fruits in juice, flatbreads, graham crackers, beans (kidney beans, black beans, baked beans etc.), peas (black-eyed peas, green peas, etc.), and popcorn.