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## 3 DIY PRE-COMPETITION MEALS FOR THE WHOLE TEAM

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BY JILL CASTLE, MS, RDN

It's the night before a big meet, and the team is getting together for a pre-competition meal. Should you go out to a restaurant, or stay in? If you've got a willing parent and a venue, I say cook! Not only will there be money saved, and greater control over the food ingredients, your team may even achieve a higher level of camaraderie.

The whole idea behind these DIY (Do It Yourself) home-style, pre-competition meals is to create a meal that athletes can create themselves. In doing so, they learn about food combinations and the nutrition ingredients of a sports diet. A smorgasbord where swimmers can assemble their own meal also allows individual athletes to satisfy their appetite, and choose meal components that best fit their nutritional needs.

Try these three pre-competition meal ideas for your next at-home team dinner:

### MAKE YOUR OWN PIZZA PARTY

Yes, pizza can be a healthy food! Use raw pizza dough, which you can get from your grocery store in the bakery section, the local pizza joint or make your own, or buy the pre-made crust. Go for whole-wheat versions if you can, or at least offer both options. Next, gather up the toppings: canned tomato sauce or paste, and jarred spaghetti sauce work well for the base of the pizza. Put out a variety of herbs, including garlic powder, basil, oregano and red pepper flakes. Part-skim mozzarella cheese keeps the fat content reasonable. For meats, choose lean ham, Canadian bacon, turkey pepperoni and/or sausage. Don't forget the veggies! Red and green peppers, onions, mushrooms, broccoli, asparagus, eggplant, avocado—the sky is the limit! Keep the variety of vegetables high, and the fat content of meat and cheeses low to increase overall nutrition.



**Execute:** Allow each athlete to make his own pizza, rolling out the dough or building the pizza on a pre-made crust. Bake or grill several pizzas at a time. Have a large green salad and fruit salad on the side along with water to drink.

### SOUTHWESTERN SOIREE

Personally, this is my favorite athlete party to host, because there are several twists on the theme. You can go the taco or fajita route, or just pile everything in a bowl and chow down.

Make a large pot of rice and a large pot of pinto or black beans. A rice cooker and a crockpot can be very handy for this. Lay out the following ingredients: chopped tomatoes, shredded lettuce, chopped onion or sliced green onion, reduced-fat Mexican blend cheese or Monterey Jack cheese, diced avocado, jalapeno peppers, salsa, and low-fat sour cream. Whole-wheat tortillas or taco shells fit alongside nicely as well.



**Execute:** In assembly line fashion, let athletes pull together their own tacos, burritos or Southwestern bowls. Add honeydew melon or watermelon slices on the side to cool things down. Serve water to drink.

### ITALIAN EATERY

Pasta is always an athlete favorite, but can you create a dinner that allows them to pile on the nutrition? Sure! Just supply the ingredients, including meats and veggies, a sauce or two, and of course, cooked pasta. Here are some ideas: cook one or two varieties of pasta like spaghetti and rigatoni. Don't forget to toss in a little bit of olive oil so the pasta doesn't stick together. Prepare turkey meatballs in the oven or crockpot; bake turkey sausages too. Steam some broccoli and zucchini in the microwave. Warm up a marinara sauce (jarred or homemade) and an alternative, such as low fat Alfredo sauce. Set all the ingredients out, smorgasbord-style, including some good Parmesan cheese. Have a side of salad, fruit and bread.



**Execute:** Athletes can move through the line and choose their pasta, sauce, meat and veggies, creating their own Italian meal.

What is your favorite pre-competition meal? Can you turn it into a home-style DIY favorite for the whole team?

*Jill Castle, MS, RDN is a childhood nutrition expert and co-author of [Fearless Feeding: How to Raise Healthy Eaters from High Chair to High School](#) ([www.fearlessfeeding.com](http://www.fearlessfeeding.com)). She is the creator of [Just The Right Byte](#) ([www.justtherightbyte.com](http://www.justtherightbyte.com)), and is working on her next book for young athletes, called [Eat, Compete & Grow](#). She lives with her husband and four children in New Canaan, CT. Questions? Contact her at [Jill@JillCastle.com](mailto:Jill@JillCastle.com).*

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