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TOP TIPS FOR EATING IN THE OFF-SEASON

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Recently, a swim coach asked me the following question:

"My team trains 5-6 times per week, but we do take April and August off. Should anything change with their eating habits when swimmers are not in the water for many hours each day?"

Great question, coach. Although most athletes do train year round, there are times when they are not expending as many calories.

Here are some tips for the down time from swim practice and competition:

Downsize the portions. During the off-season, calorie needs are not as high as when you are in the pool for hours each day. Off-season is a good time to learn the difference between a portion and a serving. A portion is what you choose to eat (for example, the entire box of Wheat Thins) versus a serving (about 15 crackers). The calorie difference is about 1120 calories! Young athletes may need more than a serving, but by paying attention to the calories in a serving, you will learn how to balance calories to match activity. No need to hunt through the kitchen for measuring cups when you can use visual cues to judge serving sizes. Your fist is about the size of a cup of pasta, a baseball is the right size for a baked potato serving, visualize a large egg for a serving of ¼ cup of trail mix, and a 2-Tablespoon serving of peanut butter is the size of ping pong ball. For more serving size comparisons see the card that you can download at:

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/eat-right/distortion.htm>

Ditch the extra snacks. If you are not swimming hard every day, you don't need the recovery snacks. Energy bars, granola bars, trail mix and chocolate milk are all great recovery snacks to help you replace fuel used in a workout. It is especially important to eat after working out if you are going to swim the next day. But, if during the off-season, your only activity is school, then you don't need to continue to snack on high-calorie foods. Snacking is great for kids, just stick to fruit, yogurt, or veggies and dip when you don't need the extra calories.

Deliver good nutrition. Off-season, even if just for a month, is a good time rest and recover. Eating well during this time can help your body repair and rebuild from hard training. Try to eat healthy foods for breakfast lunch, and dinner by eating more vegetables, fruits, lean proteins, quality carbohydrates and healthy fats at every meal. The sports dietitians for the US Olympic Committee have developed some good tools to help you eat well. Check out the [athlete's plate](#) for "easy" days and try to model your meals on what elite athletes eat.

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