

When to Eat Around Your Workouts

A common question I get asked about is when to eat around a workout. Should I eat before working out if I want to lose weight? Should I eat after a workout? What should I eat before and after a workout? Let's go through each of these questions and hopefully give you some guidance.

Should you eat before a workout? Short answer: Yes! Long Answer: The main reason you should eat before a workout is so that you can put your 100% effort into it. The science behind the exact process of carb and fat utilisation for energy is long and confusing and there are many mixed studies out there to confuse the matter even more. So let's keep it simple. Carbs are the body's favourite source of fuel. Carbohydrate stores in the body deplete over time, especially during an overnight fast. Carbs are metabolised much faster than fats to produce the body with energy. But if they are depleted, they have no choice but to use fat for fuel. You might think, 'great, that's exactly what I want!', BUT... If you were to do a high intensity workout, any more than a light steady walk, the fat metabolism will not be able to keep up with the energy requirements. That means you will not be able to maintain that intensity throughout the entire workout. You will burn more calories during and after a high intensity workout using both fat and carbs for fuel, than you would during a light steady state workout. So long story short, it makes sense to have a quick nibble before heading out the door, give yourself enough energy to really work hard through that workout, and reap the calorie burning benefits, rather than trying to purely burn fat to fuel your workout.

Should I eat after a workout? Short Answer: Yes! Long answer: During exercise your body is put through stress. Your muscles have broken down and we need to repair and rebuild to ensure we maintain lean muscle mass, because we know the more lean muscle mass we have, the better our calorie burning abilities. Eating something after a workout begins the rebuild and repair phase. How long after? Some say straight away, others say an hour, others say it doesn't matter. But the sooner the post workout meal, the quicker the recovery, so I usually say an hour. Now if you skip a post workout meal every now and then, it's not going to kill you, but don't get into this habit. Try to allow time after your workout to refuel with a snack, this will reap the most benefits from workout.

What should you eat? Before a workout, aim for carbs and a little protein. Carbs as mentioned earlier is your primary fuel source so fuel up before your workout. I would suggest eating anywhere from 30-90 minutes before a workout, depending on how you feel exercising after a meal. A light snack 30-45minutes prior I find is best. Toast with peanut butter, fruit and yogurt, weetbix and banana, all great pre workout meal if exercising in the morning. Chicken sandwich, brown rice and tuna, sweet potato and mushroom omelette, perfect pre workout meal if working out later in the day. Post workout you want to consume protein and carbs. Protein are the building blocks for recovery so protein is important post workout. Egg on toast, smoothie with fruit and whey protein, Greek yogurt, fruit and nuts, oats with whey protein, good post workout breakfast meals. Or if working out later in the day, you might have pasta and mince, chicken and rice, fish and baked potato. Meat or tofu and noodle stir fries are also great.

Experiment with foods and timings that suit you best. Everyone is different so there is never going to be one rule to pre and post workout meal timing. Take home message. Try to eat something carb based before a workout to provide your body with enough energy to push hard and burn maximum calories during your workout. Then begin the repair and recovery process as soon as you can with a protein carb mix after your workout. And remember that diet and exercise go hand in hand so don't focus all your energy on just one of them. Utilise them both to get maximum results.