

# BigTime Sports Nutrition- Post-Exercise

Most athletes do not know what they need in order to give themselves a chance to recover from a tough bout of exercise. Athletes feel that more than anything they need an abundance of calories. What they really need is to eat the same meals after the activity as they did in preparing for it. Remember, muscles need fuel, whether preparing for exercise or recovering from it. By choosing foods carefully and replenishing fluids, recovery will be much quicker and you will be better prepared for the next workout.

Recovery meals for people who work out only three to four times a week are not as crucial as for people who work out everyday in an intense sport or workout routine. If there are rest days in between, it is easier to recover your muscle glycogen stores in time. Training is using up glycogen stores, refueling them, and getting the body use to those cycles. If practicing every day, or twice a day (i.e. two-a-days in football) recovery meals are extremely important.

The top priority for any athlete when recovering from exercise is to replace fluid loss. The best choices for replacing fluids are:

- Water- this is really convenient, easy on your stomach, and the least expensive.
- Juices- they supply water, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals.

- High water-content foods such as watermelon, grapes, and soups that will supply a variety of other nutrients besides fluids.
- Sports drinks- the ones that are high in carbohydrates are the best.

If a lot of fluids are lost, especially from a long and tough competition, (long race, football game, basketball game, etc.) extra fluids should be put into your body for the next two days. This will help in getting back into the proper water balance.

Carbohydrates are as important for recovery as they are for pre-competition meals. It is possible to totally replace glycogen stores within 20 hours after exercise. The ideal time to replace glycogen stores is 15-30 minutes after exercise, because that is when the body will utilize the carbohydrates most effectively. Eating foods high in carbohydrates every few hours will replace glycogen stores the best. Some snacks that are high in carbohydrates are:

- 8 ounces of orange juice and a medium bagel
- 16 ounces of cranberry juice
- one bowl of corn flakes with milk and a banana

Remember, carbohydrates are the main fuel source, and if the stores are not kept full, performance will suffer.

The post-exercise meal is also a pre-exercise meal. It is also important to get protein into a recovery diet. Although a lot of it is not needed, a little bit can be helpful. Protein can help enhance the effect of insulin to get glucose into the muscles. A good ratio is one gram of protein to three grams of carbohydrates.



Once again, eating a well balanced diet is just as important for recovery as it is before competition. Getting a variety of foods and concentrating on the important things will enhance recovery and start the process over for the next winning effort! The last, but definitely not least, component to recovery from competition is rest. If the body is pushed too hard, it will not receive the time needed to recover. If you push too hard, it will start to reject your efforts. The old saying of “no pain, no gain” is not always true.

After intense bouts of exercise, the body may need a few days to replace lost fluids and nutrients. Without rest, it will not get that chance. There is a difference between overloading the body to get results, and overtraining, which can cause injury, fatigue, and damaged performance.