



Sport Nutrition

Tip of the Month | April 2011



Healthy Choices on the Run: Fast Foods

Athletes and coaches are often “on the run” and need to stop and fuel up no matter where they are. This often means turning to fast food options. But not to worry, with a few smart strategies, fast food choices can be healthy – just try not to opt for fast foods morning, noon and night. Also, don’t skip meals and get so hungry that you overload on excess fats and sugars from fried foods and high sugar drinks.

While fast food meals usually provide ample protein and complex carbohydrates (e.g. bread, buns, rice, beans, pasta), careful planning may be necessary to find options that include **fresh vegetables, fruit** (not just juice), **100% whole grains** (e.g. whole wheat bun or pizza crust, white/brown rice, quinoa, barley, corn, regular/whole wheat pasta cooked al dente, baked potato & skin, kidney beans/chili), and **milk/alternatives**. The key is to “balance” the fast food meal or snack with vegetables, fruit and milk/alternatives.

For a nutritionally balanced diet that supports top performance and optimal exercise recovery, be sure to follow this simple rule of thumb*:



For meals:
Include **3 to 4** major food groups.

For snacks:
Include **2 to 3** major food groups.

And don’t forget fluids – especially water, lower fat milk/products, 100% fruit juice and appropriate use of sport drinks.

Smart strategies for eating healthy ‘on the run’:

Not all athletes need to watch their weight and eat small portions. Be smart, **choose more** vegetables, fruit and milk products and **cut down on** excess fat, salt and refined sugar. Athletes who sweat a lot need some extra sodium, so total avoidance is not smart either.

- **Make smart menu selections** – pay attention to the descriptions on the menu. Try to avoid battered/deep-fried, breaded, creamy, crispy, au gratin or in cream sauce. These options are often high in calories, unhealthy fats and/or sodium.
- **Be careful with salt** – fast food restaurant food tends to be high in sodium. Instead of salty fries, order a side salad and go easy on commercial dressings that are often high in sodium.
- **Stay away from high calorie drinks** – pop is a huge source of hidden and empty calories. Try drinking water, 100% fruit juices, or milk/alternatives instead. Diet drinks do not refuel muscles during recovery.
- **Avoid super sized portions** if weight is an issue. Some fast food meals can run up to 1000-2000 calories or more. Choose a smaller portion size, order a side salad instead of fries and make your beverage count. Athletes with higher energy needs may require bigger portions and/or more frequent snacking.
- **Special order** – ask for baked, broiled, steamed, or stir-fried, instead of battered, deep-fried items. Request vegetables and main dishes without rich sauces. Avoid large amounts of dressings, spreads and extra cheese. Choose oil & vinegar, French, or Italian dressings in small amounts or ask for them “on the side.”



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The **amounts** of the following fast foods menu choices will vary depending on energy needs.



Choose this ...



Instead of this...

Grilled chicken sandwich, side salad, milk

Plain hamburger, garden salad, ½ pkg. Italian dressing, milk or 100% fruit juice

Roast beef sub sandwich, lettuce, tomato etc., apple, low fat milk/chocolate milk

Warm grilled chicken salad, ½ pkg. of dressing, whole wheat bun, fresh fruit

Pizza (cheese/veggies), whole wheat crust

Pork/chicken souvlaki, whole wheat pita, with a Greek salad, dressing on the side

Minestrone soup, crusty roll, fruit, yogurt

Shrimp/chicken/tofu stir fry on steamed rice

Fresh fruit smoothie

Chicken/beef/shrimp fajita, veggies, fruit (or 100% fruit juice)

¼ chicken (no skin), baked potato, salad, fruit

Beef and broccoli stir fry on rice or noodles, tea/water, fresh fruit

English muffin breakfast sandwich, orange juice and coffee or milk/alternative

Bowl of chili con carne, whole wheat bagel, chocolate milk

Breaded, fried chicken sandwich with fries

Double cheeseburger, large fries, large cola

Philly (Roast beef and melted cheese) sandwich, large soda pop

Crispy chicken salad, 1 pkg. creamy dressing, large cola, fried apple pie

Pizza (double cheese + pepperoni/sausage)

Sweet & sour pork, fried rice and battered deep fried veggies, diet soda

Cream soup, bagel & cream cheese, doughnut

Fettuccine alfredo with garlic bread, large pop

Large soda/pop and pastry

Beef taco with double cheese, refried beans, sour cream on a deep-fried taco shell

¼ chicken (with skin), fries, pie/ice cream

Sweet and sour chicken balls with fried rice, chow mein, double plum sauce

Bagel with cream cheese, diet cola or Red Bull

Large nachos with melted cheese, large cola

Not all fast foods are “bad” for you. Be smart – start making the right choices!



*For more information on nutrition that supports a balanced diet, read “From Training Diet to Meal Plans”, “Training Diet – Food Sources of Minerals”, and “Training Diet – Food Sources of Vitamins” on coach.ca