

Recovery Fluids and Foods

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After you finish a hard workout, your top dietary priority should be to replace the fluids you lost by sweating so that your body can get back into water balance. As discussed in chapter 8, if you will be doing exercise that puts you at risk of becoming underhydrated, you should know your sweat rate. The goal is to drink on a schedule and lose no more than 2 percent of your body weight (e.g., 3 pounds for a 150-pound person). Ideally, you will have minimized dehydration during the event—but that can be hard to do during intense exercise.

One large, muscular man who spent two hours at the gym doing an hour of cardio and an hour of strength training was shocked to discover he'd lost about 8 pounds (3.6 kg) during the morning sessions—5 percent of his body weight and the equivalent of a gallon (4 L) of sweat! (One pound of sweat loss represents 16 ounces of fluid.) By weighing himself, he became aware of the importance of drinking more. He started bringing a gallon of water to the gym. He'd drink one quart every half hour and make sure that he finished the whole gallon. These steps to prevent dehydration helped him recover far more quickly—and he felt much better the rest of the day.

Your second priority is to optimize muscle glycogen replenishment, particularly if you have completed one hard workout and will be exercising again within 4 to 6 hours. As soon as tolerable after your first workout, you want to consume carbohydrate-rich foods and beverages; if they contain a little protein, even better. Your target intake is about 0.5 gram of carbohydrate per pound (1 g per kg) of body weight every hour, taken at 30-minute intervals for four to five hours (Ivy 2001) or until you eat a meal. Let's assume that you weigh 150 pounds (68 kg):

150 lb 3 0.5 g carb = 75 g carb

Since 1 gram of carbohydrate contains 4 calories, you'll need about 300 calories of carbohydrate within the first hour, or as soon as tolerable after exercise, let's say within 15 minutes after the workout ends, and then again in 15 more minutes. After another 30 minutes, you should consume another dose of the 300 calories of high-carbohydrate foods. Then you can keep grazing for four to five hours.

Your body will naturally want carbohydrate-based recovery meals and repeated snacks, if not initially, then in an hour or so.

If you've been exercising so hard that you have concerns about replacing depleted glycogen stores, the chances are good that you are hungry for lots more calories. You can eat more than the calculated amount, but extra carbohydrate will not hasten the recovery process. Choose forms of carbohydrate that taste good, settle well, and help you feel better. Your daily carbohydrate intake should be about 3 to 5 grams per pound (6 to 10 g

per kg) of body weight (450 to 750 g of carbohydrate for a 150 lb athlete) or more if you are doing extreme exercise.

Adding a little protein to the carbohydrate can enhance recovery (Ivy 2001). Although engineered sports foods may advertise a 3 or

4 to 1 ratio of carbohydrate to protein, you need not get obsessed about the exact ratio. The idea is to eat primarily carbohydrate with a little protein as the accompaniment.

If exercise diminishes your appetite, you might find liquids more appealing than solid foods. Enjoy some chocolate milk or a fruit smoothie. But, if you are ravenous, there's little wrong with lean roast beef on a kaiser roll, plus some noodle soup with crackers, and a glass of juice or chocolate milk. Think of the roast beef as being an accompaniment to the other carbohydrate-rich choices, and you'll end up with a carbohydrate-rich diet after all.


Your body will naturally want carbohydrate-based recovery meals and repeated snacks, if not initially, then in an hour or so. Liquids and solid foods will refuel your muscles equally well. Some popular carbohydrate-based food suggestions that offer a little protein (and a little sodium) include the following:

VB juice and a turkey sub

A fruit smoothie (made with yogurt or milk) and a handful of pretzels

Cran-apple juice, string cheese, and some crackers

A bowl of Cheerios with milk and a banana

Some exhausted athletes seek out protein—hamburgers, steaks. After hours of sugary sports drinks and gels, their bodies want some protein. If that's your case, enjoy the steak—along with potato and rolls. 

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