



FACT SHEET

Nutrition & the Travelling Athlete

Long distance travel is a way of life for many athletes.

Whether you're travelling overseas, interstate or spending a couple of hours in a car or bus, your aim is to arrive ready to perform at your best. If you have trained well, you owe it to yourself to be well-prepared for your trip. Travelling for competition can often take on a holiday atmosphere, pushing good nutrition to one side. Your goal is to meet all your nutrient needs for training and competition despite the challenges presented from travelling.

Road & train travel

If you are travelling a relatively short distance in a car, bus or train then the following nutrition tips will be helpful:

- Take responsibility for your own success. Bring your own food with you, so that you do not have to rely on roadside cafés or club cars for your nutrition. Nutritious portable snacks could include fruit, sandwiches, low-fat muesli bars or cereal bars, yoghurt and plenty of water.
- When you travel you are not being active, and may need to eat less than you do on training days. It's easy to eat more than you need, especially if the travel is boring. Plan your eating times rather than snacking continuously on the trip, and keep yourself occupied with travelling board games, music, or a book. At the same time, avoid getting too hungry, which may make you tempted by the first fast food outlet you see.
- Remember to look after your food. Travelling with an esky or small cooler allows you to keep food and drinks cold to minimise bacterial growth

Table 1. Nutritious 'on the road' snacks & fluids

Fresh fruit, tinned fruit
 Breakfast bars & cereal bars
 Muesli bars (lower fat versions)
 Fruit bars
 Dried fruit and nut mixes eg sultanas, almonds, trail mix
 Fruit juices
 Breakfast cereal
 Sandwiches, bread rolls
 Fruit bread, fruit buns
 Low fat flavoured milks
 Water
 Meal replacement drinks eg Sustagen Sport
 Rice crackers, wholemeal cracker biscuits

Plane travel

Airline travel can be arduous. When travelling overseas, consider the possibility of starting to adjust your body clock to your destination time in the two or three days before departure. As soon as you get on the plane, set your watch for the time at your destination and aim to sleep mainly when it's evening at your destination.

On arrival, immediately adopt local times for eating and sleeping and get out into the daylight when possible, even if it's for a short walk. Avoid catnapping for more than an hour during the day and go to bed at the same local time as you would at home.

If you travel interstate for only a day or two, keep to your regular home-state time so you don't try to change your body clock twice in 48 hours. This is commonly done by teams in national competitions. If possible, arrive at your destination well before the event to allow time for your body to adjust to the new time.

Airline travel presents a number of challenges for athletes. If you are expected to travel regularly, being a good traveller is an important part of being successful at international competition. The following suggestions will assist you in dealing with airline travel:

- Airlines no longer cater for athlete friendly meals. The only exception may be when travelling in a large sporting team where the team's sports dietitian or manager has been successful in negotiating an "Athlete Meal". Take a supply of suitable snack foods to supplement the meals provided (see Table 1).
- The vegetarian meal choice on most airlines is usually rice or pasta based so is a good alternative if you are expected to train or compete shortly after arrival.
- Long hours of travel can upset your digestive system. To minimise constipation, drink plenty of fluids and eat fibre-rich foods such as fresh fruit, wholemeal bread, breakfast cereals and vegetables. When flying, a vegetarian or low fat meal usually provides more fibre than the regular meals.
- It is very important to keep up the fluids. The humidity in an aircraft is around 10-15%, which means that moisture is evaporated from your body. Drink water, or mineral water, with occasional fruit juice or soft drink. Travelling with your own drink bottle on long flights is a great idea. Don't be afraid to ask for extra water.
- Avoid drinking alcohol-containing drinks as these are more likely to result in dehydration.

Destination Nutrition Tips

If you are going to an unfamiliar location, it's important to be aware of what foods and food preparation facilities are available where you are staying. You will need to investigate the food outlets close by, cooking facilities, opening and closing times of restaurants and supermarkets and whether you need to take any supplement foods such as powdered liquid meals. Talk to your sports dietitian, research on the net, or speak to local sporting clubs and venues. If you are travelling from a cool climate to a warm climate, it may take 7-10 days to acclimatise to the warmer weather. To speed things up, it is wise to do some training in warmer conditions before you depart (e.g. training in warmer parts of the day or in a gym with the heater turned on). As your sweat will be initially higher in sodium with a change to warmer weather, you can replace this sodium loss by drinking a sports drink or adding a little salt to your meals for the first week. Thereafter your sweat sodium levels will have adjusted to a lower level.

Eating Out 'on the road'

The following tips will assist you in meeting your daily food and fluid needs if you are reliant on eating out for your meals:

- Make sure that your water glass is topped up regularly to help with hydration goals. When extra carbohydrate is needed, soft drinks or fruit juice may also be a good option.
- You may have to request extra bread rolls or a larger serve of pasta or steamed rice to get enough carbohydrates. Avoid dishes that are high in fats such as deep fried foods or creamy based sauces.
- Ask the food outlet to go easy on the cream, hold the cheese sauce or provide extra noodles. If having pizza, try asking for half the normal amount of cheese.
- Some event venues provide athletes with unlimited food. You will need to eat sensibly, despite the desire to try everything provided. Remember that your training has tapered down, so you don't need as much food as during heavy training periods.
- It's a good idea in an all-you-can-eat buffet restaurant or dining hall to use the menu board and select one main meal choice. It's a better strategy than simply heaping food onto your plate as you pass down the tray line.
- If you are having a main course based on meat, fish or poultry, choose a medium sized portion and don't forget the fuel foods such as a baked potato or a side dish of rice. A bread basket is another good idea for topping up on carbohydrate foods.
- Order side serves of vegetables or salad if they don't come with the meal. Ask for black pepper, tomato sauce or salsa rather than buttery sauces, and lemon juice rather salad dressings. You can always order dressing on the side so you can add the desired amount to suit your needs.
- Desserts are not mandatory – keep your overall nutrition goals in mind. Carbohydrate rich desserts include rice pudding, bread and butter pudding, sorbet, fruit salad, fruit crumble and custard. If you're watching your total energy intake, finish up with a fruit platter or skim milk hot chocolate.

Make your plane trip more enjoyable by:

- Occasionally getting up to do some stretches down the back of the aircraft. This helps keep you alert and relieves the monotony of long flights. Try a quick wash near the end of the flight to freshen up.
- Wearing comfortable shoes that can be easily loosened (e.g. runners) as your feet tend to swell on long flights. Wear loose clothing and avoid anything that will dig into your body. Compression leggings or socks can also be useful.
- Taking books, magazines, playing cards, chess, computer games or some other form of non-food activity to avoid boredom eating.
- Pre-organise your seat preference when, or soon after, your flight is booked. Aisle seats give you more freedom to move around. If you have long legs request the row with the best leg room. If you are a 'frequent flyer' then seating arrangements can be made to suit you ahead of time.
- Use ear plugs and an eye mask to help you sleep.

Self Catering

You may be expected to cater for yourself while travelling, particularly if you are travelling for extended periods of time. Talk with your sports dietitian, ask experienced athletes who have previously travelled to the destination, or search the internet for information. The following tips will assist you in making sure you meet your nutrition needs while self catering overseas:

- Be sure to take a selection of your favourite recipes. The Survival cookbook series written by the Australian Institute of Sport includes a range of modified recipes designed for travelling athletes.
- Locate the nearest supermarket upon arrival and make sure you check their opening times and days. Many countries have fresh markets once or twice a week which provide excellent produce as well.
- Breakfast cereal, sports drink, sports bars, liquid meal supplements, cereal or muesli bars are examples of foods that are not always available when travelling to foreign countries. Be sure to pack your own supply of foods that 'you can't live without'.
- A microwave rice cooker with combination steamer are a great travelling companion particularly if cooking facilities are limited at your destination. They're extremely versatile allowing you to cook pasta, rice, risottos, and vegetables.
- Ask your sports dietitian to have a cooking class before you leave to brush up on your cooking skills and get some ideas for cooking quick, nutritious meals with a limited pantry.

On arrival

When you arrive at your destination you improve your chances of a good night's sleep by:

- Going for a light training session, or a good walk, about three hours before bedtime.
- Eat a high carbohydrate snack before bedtime. It increases brain serotonin, which may help you to sleep.
- Keep the bedroom cool. Warm rooms can upset the sleep cycle.
- Don't nap for longer than an hour through the day, or you may not get to bed tired.