

The Olympic Athlete Diet

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Five nutrition experts working with Olympic athletes share their health secrets and a favorite recipe to help you customize your workout. By: [Patricia Bannan, MS, RD](#)

How to Eat Like an Olympian



Photo: Corbis

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For Olympic athletes, training and competing is a way of life, so properly fueling their bodies is critically important to their success. It's not uncommon for an athlete to train up to 6 hours per day, 6 days per week. While that's likely quite a bit more than the average person's typical activity regimen, eating like an Olympian may benefit you too. Five gold medal-grade nutritionists dish out their famous clients' diet secrets and advice for us average Joes.

1. Eat Smart, Eat Frequently to Maximize Performance



Photo: Corbis

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For the Athlete: Sports dietitian, Tavis Piattoly, MS, RD, works with Olympic sprinter Kelly-Ann Baptiste, from Trinidad and Tobago, to ensure she's fueling her body properly to maximize performance. Pre-training foods Piattoly recommends consist of lean protein and complex carbs, such as whole-grain bread, oatmeal, fresh fruit, eggs, Greek yogurt, and whey protein. "We also focus on healthy fats like natural peanut butter, whole eggs, fish oil supplements, and nuts to help with satiety," he adds.

For You: Piattoly says, "The principles of sports nutrition never change regardless if you're a weekend warrior, average exerciser, or elite athlete; the only aspect that changes is the total caloric intake. Whether I'm working with a mom who plays tennis five days a week or an Olympian, we still focus on the same eating principles such as eating every 3 to 4 hours, eating after training to enhance recovery, and hydrating well."

Recipe for Maximum Performance: Lean Chili



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Photo: Becky Luigart-Stayner

Piattoly has his own lean chili recipe he recommends to all his athletes. This dish gets a hefty dose of protein from the extra lean ground meat and beans as well as a punch of vitamins and antioxidants from the tomatoes, peppers, and carrots. Combine 1 pound of browned extra lean ground beef or ground turkey breast, 1 bag shredded carrots, 1 can drained spicy pinto or kidney beans, 1 cup chopped onion, 1 cup chopped green pepper, 1 chopped tomato, 1 cup chopped celery, 1 bottle low-sodium tomato juice, 2 tablespoons chili powder, and 1 tablespoon garlic powder. Simmer 30 minutes until the veggies are tender.

Or view our **Chunky Vegetarian Chili**. Just add cooked extra lean ground beef or turkey breast to the chili for an extra dose of protein.

2. Plan for Maximum Recovery to Get Lean



Photo: Corbis

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For the Athlete: Research scientist Steve Hertzler, PhD, RD, worked with Olympic weightlifter Holley Mangold on her nutrition plan, with an emphasis on post-workout nutrition. “The goal isn’t to reduce her weight to that of a swimmer or an endurance runner, but to help her reach a body weight that will allow her to perform at an optimal level and not be too heavy,” explains Hertzler.

For You: Hertzler says the three key principles of sports nutrition—eating to fuel the body, eating to repair the body, and eating to be healthy—apply to Olympic-level athletes and the average exerciser. He says to eat a piece of fruit before each meal, make sure to consume a blend of lean protein and carbs within 30 minutes after your workout, plan your meals ahead, and get healthy sources of calcium and protein that are low in fat.

Recipe for Recovery: Chocolate Peanut Butter Shake



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Photo: Karry Hosford

Hertzler swears by a post-workout chocolate-peanut butter shake to restore balance in the body. Blend 1 cup skim or vanilla soy milk, 1 banana, 1 scoop of chocolate protein powder (such as Chocolate EAS Recovery Protein Powder), and 2 tablespoons creamy peanut butter.

We also like our smoothie version: **Chocolate Peanut Butter Smoothie.**

3. Portion Control is Key for Strength Training



Photo: Corbis

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For the Athlete: Sports dietitian Andrea Braakhuis, PhD, who works with BMX rider Arielle Martin and at the U.S. Olympic Committee Training Center in Chula Vista, WI, says nutrition during the training session all depends on the intensity and type of session. “If the session is greater than 1-and-a-half hours and moderate to high intensity, then a banana or carbohydrate gels are warranted. If the athlete is completing a weights session, then a small amount of protein with a portion of carbohydrate is a better option,” advises Braakhuis.

For You: Braakhuis says regular exercisers may not be training at the intensity or type of sessions expected of the Olympic athletes and should be wary of taking in too many calories; she suggests the regular exerciser watch the portion size of their snack options. Fruit and lean protein can be used in moderation to hold stamina.

Recipe for Healthy Indulgence: Cookie Dough Dip



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Photo: chocolatecoveredkatie.com

Braakhuis said BMX rider, Arielle Martin is a huge foodie and has adapted a fantastic chocolate chip cookie dough dip. The base of this dip is chickpeas and peanut butter – a much healthier variation. She processes 1 can of drained and rinsed chickpeas, $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon salt, 2 teaspoon vanilla, 1- $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons natural peanut butter, and 2 teaspoons honey in a food processor. She then slowly adds $\frac{1}{4}$ cup milk until the mixture is creamy and folds in chocolate chips.

We found a similar **Cookie Dough Dip** by healthy dessert blogger, Chocolate-Covered Katie, that we think Arielle Martin will also like.

4. Give Food Function for Endurance Training



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Photo: Corbis

For the Athlete: Performance nutritionist Krista Austin, PhD, CSCS, is working with the U.S.A. Taekwondo Olympic Team and has also worked with a number of Olympic marathon runners and swimmers. One of her top training tips is: “Eat to train, don’t train so you can eat!” Austin says this gives food function instead of just promoting mindless eating.

For You: Consuming low-glycemic foods steadily throughout the day, focusing on hydration and the type of foods you eat are top tips that apply to

the non-athlete. “If the everyday person adheres to these suggestions, they should be able to optimize their health, perform better workouts, and even do their job better,” explains Austin.

Recipe for International Flavor: Eritrean-Style Food



Austin says the number one thing for athletes is the flavor of their food. “The

most flavorful food often comes from cultural dishes that provide unique spices,” she adds. Austin’s favorites include Injera (Ethiopian flatbread) with either Tsebhi derho (spicy chicken) or Tsebhi sega (spicy minced meat).

Think of this **Teff Injera Bread with Carrot-Ginger Chutney** for your next international food venture.

Also try, **African Chicken in a Spicy Red Sauce** for a flavor-infused, high-protein meal.

5. Balance Mindful Meals for Agility and Balance



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Photo: Corbis

For the Athlete: Adam Korzun, MS, RD, CSSD, a sport dietitian for the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Teams, says he tries to focus each athlete on consistency in timing, composition, and quality of each meal. Any athletic meal can be good for a non-athlete; the only thing to keep in mind is reducing the portion size.

For You: “You don't want to begin your workday on an empty stomach just as

an athlete does not want to begin a training session on an empty stomach. And the composition of your meal is that balance between carbs and protein that is so often overlooked when we eat in a hurry or snack. Focus on giving yourself the best type of fuel,” Korzun explains.

Recipe for a Comforting Cool Down: Salmon Fish Tacos with Avocado Slaw



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Photo: Johnny Autry

Korzun likes to create familiar comfort foods with a healthy, performance-inspired twist. For example, he recently had a cookout with the Alpine Team after a long day of "max performance" testing in the gym. They cooked fish tacos with salmon, grilled peppers, and avocado slaw for dinner. “The idea was to use a fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids and grill it instead of frying. Serve on corn tortillas, which provide more fiber than flour tortillas, and use a cabbage slaw instead of lettuce for more vitamin A and fiber. Use avocado in

place of mayo for a lighter slaw rich in unsaturated fats,” Korzun suggests.

We hope the Alpine Team will also give our **Tuna-Guacamole Tacos** a try.

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