



## Energy and performance boosting foods

When it comes to giving you energy and increasing physical performance (whether you're running a marathon or just walking around the block), not all foods are created equal. Getting a healthy balance of macro-nutrients (carbs, fats, and protein) is important, but there are a lot of heavy-hitting vitamins and minerals that make the difference as well.

**Eat iron to pump iron!** Well, actually, getting enough iron in your diet will help with all kinds of performance, not just weight lifting. Having an iron deficiency can result in both fatigue and a weaker immune system. Most people think the best source of iron is red meat, but actually, beans, lentils, and leafy greens are great sources as well.

**Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.** Well, we've all heard that before, but when it comes to energy, getting an early morning jumpstart is vital. Try to eat a mix of carbs, protein, and fats. One quick and easy suggestion would be yogurt with fruit and nuts.

**Eat as close to fresh as possible.** Many nutritionists believe that the most nutrients can be found in fresh food, and more nutrients means more energy. Buying produce that's been recently picked can have a measurable impact on nutrient level, which is another reason to buy from local farmers' markets. (Frozen fruits and veggies are usually picked and immediately frozen, so you can get the same effect there.)

**Unprocessed is best.** Avoiding highly processed foods can be difficult, especially if you're always on the go, but it can have a huge payoff both in increasing energy and maintaining a healthy weight. Some swaps are tough, but it's pretty easy to start small. For example, instead of snacking on a fruit-and-nut bar, grab an apple and some mixed nuts. A few extra seconds in the grocery store can have a huge payoff.

**Your energy bar shouldn't sound like a science experiment.** Sometimes you're going to have to reach for that convenience food. When you do, check out the ingredients list. If you can recognize what's in that bar (i.e., whole foods like fruit and nuts), it's a pretty good bet. If it's a long string of multi-syllable, chemical sounding words, maybe you should pass. This is especially important if you're training or working out, where you need energy fast.

**Eat!** Skipping meals either as a weight management strategy or because you're too busy can completely backfire. It messes with your metabolism, which can make it harder to lose weight and increase the chances you'll overeat at your next meal. Missing meals also makes you feel more run-down and tired, so if you're already stressed, not eating can make the feeling worse.



## Drinking too much caffeine? It might be time to cut back.

Whether you drink coffee, soda, and tea for the taste or for the caffeine buzz, there comes a point when the negative side effects outweigh the risks. Although most adults can drink up to 400 milligrams of caffeine (about 4 cups of coffee) per day without experiencing serious ongoing side effects, many people experience minor side effects like jitteriness or insomnia at lower levels.

You should consider cutting back on caffeine if you experience:

- Migraine headaches
- Insomnia
- Nervousness
- Irritability
- Restlessness
- Frequent urination or inability to control urination
- Stomach upset
- Fast heartbeat
- Muscle tremors
- If you're pregnant or trying to get pregnant

Even if you're not experiencing any of these symptoms, you may still choose to cut back on caffeine. These tips may make it a little easier:

- Keep a record of how much caffeine you're drinking.
- Cut back gradually; you're more likely to stick with the change if you don't go cold turkey.
- Try decaf. Many people can't tell the difference, so it's an easy switch. That way, you don't have to kick the habit entirely.
- If you drink tea, try an herbal blend, which generally is naturally caffeine free. If you want to stick with black or green tea, shorten the brew time to cut back on caffeine.

## Working out? Try these peak performance foods.

Whether you're training for the next Ironman competition or just want to be able to walk a mile without stopping, nutrition is a vital part of any fitness goal. The intensity and length of the workout can have an effect on how much you eat before and after, but the types of foods typically remain the same.

### Before:

Ideally, fuel up two hours before you exercise by:

- **Hydrating with water.**
- **Eating healthy carbohydrates** such as whole-grain cereals (with low-fat or skim milk), whole-wheat toast, low-fat or fat-free yogurt, whole grain pasta, brown rice, fruits and vegetables.
- **Avoiding saturated fats** and even too much protein because these types of fuels digest slower in your stomach, taking away oxygen and energy-delivering blood from your muscles.

If you only have 5-10 minutes before you exercise, eat a piece of fruit such as an apple or banana.

### During:

Whether you're a professional athlete who trains for several hours or you have a low to moderate routine, keep your body hydrated with small, frequent sips of water. Proper hydration is VITAL, especially if you're working out in warm weather

You probably don't need to eat during a workout that's an hour or less. But if you're working out for longer, high intensity vigorous workouts, try eating 50-100 calories of carbohydrates every half hour, such as low-fat yogurt, raisins, or banana.

### After:

- **Fluids.** Drink water, of course. Blend your water with 100% juice such as orange juice, which provides carbohydrates.
- **Carbohydrates.** You burn a lot of carbohydrates — the main fuel for your muscles — when you exercise. In the 20-60 minutes after your workout, your muscles can store carbohydrates and protein as energy to help in recovery.
- **Protein.** Eat things with protein to help repair and grow your muscles. A lot of athletes carry nuts or cheese cubes with them to snack on after a workout.

It's important to realize that these are general guidelines. We all have different digestive systems, and everyone's metabolism is different too. Additionally, different kinds of workouts may require you to change up your diet. For example, more cardio may require more (healthy) carbs whereas tougher strength training may need more protein. Know that what you put in your body (nutrition) is as important as you what you do with your body (exercise). Both are crucial to keeping your engine performing at its best.

Adapted from [healthyforgood.heart.org](http://healthyforgood.heart.org)



Recipe of the Month:

## Blueberry Bliss Breakfast Bars

These bars make a great high-protein, nutrient rich, post-workout snack. You can substitute the nuts, seeds, and dried fruits as desired, but make sure to replace ingredients 1:1 to keep the consistency the same.

### Ingredients

- 1 ½ cups rolled oats
- ¾ cup whole almonds
- Heaping ½ cup dried blueberries
- ½ cup pistachios
- ⅓ cup ground flaxseed
- ⅓ cup walnuts
- ⅓ cup pepitas
- ¼ cup sunflower seeds
- ⅓ cup pure maple syrup or honey
- ¼ cup unsweetened apple sauce
- 1 cup almond butter

### Instructions

Line an 8"x8" baking pan with parchment or wax paper such that the paper hangs over the edges.

Add the first 8 ingredients in a large bowl and mix to combine. Add maple syrup or honey and apple sauce and combine. Mix almond butter into mixture.

Place batter in prepared pan pressing down firmly with palm of hands (or mini-roller if you have one) and distributing as evenly as possible.

Allow pan to sit in freezer for approximately 1 hour.

Remove pan from freezer. Lift singular slab from pan by lifting up on paper. Set slab down and gently peel paper away. Slice slab diagonally into 8 long bars and then cut each long bar in half to create a total of 16 bars. Bars keep best in a sealed container/bag in the freezer.

### Nutrition per serving (1 bar, makes 16 servings):

Calories: 232; Fat: 16.2g; Saturated Fat: 1.6g;  
Carbohydrates: 15.2g; Sugar: 5.1g; Fiber: 3.8g;  
Protein: 8.1g; Sodium: 2mg; Cholesterol: 0mg;

Source: [www.inspirededibles.ca](http://www.inspirededibles.ca)