



The Five Foods No Triathlete Can Live Without

BY ELIZABETH B. RAHAVI, RD
AND HOLLY O'CONNOR, RD

Food, in its great variety, is one of the best things in life. So, to boil down all of the hundreds of food options into five, well, that would be a crime! The matrix of vitamins, minerals, fats, carbohydrates, water, and protein that foods provide makes almost anything edible a functional food. This is particularly true for triathletes whose bodies are taxed and hungry for nutrients to begin the repair process from the stress they endure during training. A number of nutrients are important in the repair process, including the vitamins A and C, protein, omega-3 fatty acids, and carbohydrates. We're highlighting the following foods because they are a great source of these nutrients and almost every triathlete should be consuming more of them:

Salmon

The fatty cold-water fish that most people do not eat enough. Salmon is a good source of unsaturated fat, including the complicated-sounding omega-3 fatty acids. Unsaturated fats are not only good for the heart, but also the brain. In the recovery processes, fat helps carry the vitamins A and E to various parts of the body. Fat should make up 20-35 percent of total calorie intake, with most fats coming from unsaturated sources.

Runners Up: Tuna, Avocado, and nuts (e.g., almonds, walnuts, and pecans).

Yogurt

A great portable snack that provides protein, carbohydrates, and calcium, three important components in recovery. About one to two hours after a workout the body is primed for amino acids that are necessary to help build and replenish damaged muscles. About 10 grams is all you need, which can easily be supplied in a cup of yogurt. Here's a bonus: yogurt also has friendly bacteria that can aid in digestion and immune system functions.

Runners up: Milk, cheese, kefir, and certain energy bars.

Whole grain bread

A great source of carbohydrates, fiber, and other minerals. Carbohydrates and proteins are essential to proper training recovery. Carbohydrates are particularly important because they help restore muscle glycogen that is depleted during training. Fitting carbohydrates in throughout the day is especially important for triathletes who often need optimal muscle glycogen stores for morning and evening workouts.

Runners up: Oatmeal, whole grain crackers and cereals, brown rice.

Red bell peppers

Did you know that a red bell pepper has more vitamin C than an orange? The vitamin C and high level of antioxidants make them a great post-workout vegetable to include in any meal. The antioxidants can help the body recover from the stress it endures during training. Additionally, the vitamin C helps support immune function.

Runners up: Kiwis, strawberries, oranges.

Bananas

They're convenient and a great source of carbohydrates, potassium, and fiber. Bananas are great grab-and-go snacks that come in their own packaging for easy portability. The type of fiber bananas contain helps support the friendly bacteria in yogurt, which helps aid in digestion, and in calcium absorption, which is an important factor in bone health. Additionally, the potassium in bananas may help reduce the risk of developing high blood pressure.

Runners up: Potatoes, sweet potatoes, and beans.

You may be ahead of the game and already consuming these foods for their benefits. However, if you're not consuming these foods, start small by incorporating one of these foods a week. For example, start switching out white bread for whole grain bread. Once you've gotten the hang of that, start with another. Bon appétit!



Holly O'Connor, RD and Elizabeth Rahavi, RD are both Registered Dietitians and members of the American Dietetic Association. To find a nutrition professional in your area, go to the Association's web site: www.eatright.org.

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