

# The Best Pre- and Post- Workout Meals

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There's no arguing the benefits of regular exercise: Not only does it help you maintain a healthy weight and lift your energy levels, it also helps to boost good cholesterol levels and mitigate your risk of getting type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

To keep your body fueled for exercise, it's essential to eat a healthful diet full of nutritious foods that contain lean protein, healthy fats and complex carbohydrates.

And when you eat these foods is just as important, as the right foods will give you the strength and energy you need during your workout and will also help you recover afterwards.

To help you pinpoint the best foods for pre- and post-workout, we turned to **Franci Cohen, an NYC-based certified fitness trainer and nutritionist.** According to Cohen, navigating the pre-workout fuel-fixes is simpler than you think. "There is no 'magic food,' but any combination of simple and complex carbs work best to provide a steady stream of continuous energy to last throughout your entire workout." Cohen's post-workout meals contain lean protein, complex carbohydrates and some healthy fats. Here are her favorite foods to eat before *and* after working out.



## A Note About Timing

If you're eating a full meal before working out, it is best to wait 2 to 3 hours before heading out to the gym, says Cohen. "Eating too close to your workout time can often make you sluggish, and your energy output may be compromised due to stomach discomfort. A small snack of 150 to 200 calories an hour before your workout will do the trick!" Afterwards, Cohen says, be sure to eat a meal that contains both protein and carbohydrates within two hours. "Your focus should be on helping the muscles

recover and replacing their glycogen stores."



#### Pre-Workout Fuel: Nut Butter and Apples

If you don't want to eat a full meal before your workout, reach for this filling, fueling snack. Apples contain both simple and complex carbohydrates, plus fiber. When mixed with the protein found in nut butters (such as peanut or almond), the snack gives you a sustained energy boost you need to get the most out of your workout. In addition, the good fats found in nut butters can help lower bad blood cholesterol levels.



#### Pre-Workout Fuel: Muesli Made with Flax Seed, Raw Oats, Almond Butter and Raisins

This meal gives you a double dose of healthy fats in the form of flax seeds and almond butter. Not only do the mono- and polyunsaturated fatty acids in these foods help lower harmful blood cholesterol, your body digests fats more slowly, which helps keep you feeling satisfied for longer. Add this to the mix of complex and simple carbs delivered by the raw oats and almonds, and you have a snack that can help you power through your workout with steady energy.



#### Pre-Workout Fuel: Steel-Cut Oats with Berries and Cinnamon

A breakfast of whole-grain steel-cut oats and berries provide both complex and simple carbohydrates. According to Cohen, this combination will give you a slow and steady release of energy throughout your workout. Plus, she says, if you exercise in the wee hours of the morning, opt for strawberries, which are not only high in vitamin c, but also folic acid that stimulates mental alertness and can help you jump start your day.



#### Pre-Workout Fuel: Fruit and Cottage Cheese

Here again, Cohen recommends fruit for its energy-boosting simple carbohydrates, but tempered by protein from the cottage cheese to help sustain energy and strength. This combo also makes a great post-workout snack thanks to the muscle-building protein in cottage cheese.



**Pre-Workout Fuel: Banana with Some Cheerios Cereal**  
Here's another great way to get your energy-boosting mix of simple and complex carbs: bananas and whole-grain Cheerios. Plus, says Cohen, bananas are high in potassium, which gets lost via sweat as you workout. You can eat the cereal with milk, but not too much, warns Cohen: "Foods with a high water content such as cereal and milk or smoothies may aggravate your stomach, making working out less enjoyable, and most importantly, less productive."



**Post-Workout Fuel: Grilled Chicken Breast with Barley**  
After a hard workout, your body is in recovery mode, says Cohen, which increases your need for a nutrient-dense meal. Chicken or turkey both contain lean protein and carbohydrates, and will fill you up without making you feel bloated. The complex carbohydrates in the barley help replenish glycogen stores depleted when working out.



**Post-Workout Fuel: Greek Yogurt and Fruit**  
Similar to the cottage cheese and fruit combo, Greek yogurt is packed with protein and the mix of simple and complex carbohydrates. The protein helps rebuild muscle tissue and the carbs replenish glycogen stores.



**Post-Workout Fuel: Organic Eggs and Whole-Grain Toast**  
Eggs are an excellent source of muscle-building protein, which, when paired with the easily digestible complex carbs in the whole-grain toast, help you recover from your workout by giving you sustained energy. Look for eggs enriched with heart-healthy omega-3s, which have been shown to have anti-



### Post-Workout Fuel: Quinoa Pasta with an Extra-Lean Meatball

Quinoa is the only “grain” (actually, a type of seed) that’s also a complete protein, which means that you won’t get the same kind of energy crash you’d get after eating white pasta. It also contains polyunsaturated fatty acids, which have been shown to act as an antioxidant. The added protein of a meatball made from super lean beef or turkey makes this an excellent, muscle-building meal.



### Post-Workout Fuel: Turkey Chili with Brown Rice

It’s lean protein again, for the win. Low-fat, protein-packed turkey chili helps you rebuild muscle tissue without the harmful saturated fat you’d find in ordinary chili made with ground beef, and the brown rice adds energy-replenishing complex carbs plus filling fiber. If you’re particularly hungry after a tough workout, add an ounce of diced avocado. Their good-for-you fats help keep you feeling fuller longer.