

NEED A KICK? FOOD IS FUEL

By Dhivya Arasappan

Sometimes I wonder whether we eat to live or live to eat?

But it doesn't have to be an either/or scenario—perhaps we can do a bit of both.

From rolling out of bed to walking to the dining hall to pick up something for dinner, we move our bodies every day. And even when we think we're sitting still for hours on end grinding out school work, our bodies are still moving. At a cellular level, many of the foods we eat are broken down into sugars, amino acids, and fats, all of which play an essential role in fueling different cells.

With all the running and lunging, stretching, and swinging involved in squash, it's no wonder why I sometimes feel like I'm about to fall apart at the end of a practice session. But I've learned through trial and error that how I feel is often related to how I fuel and hydrate both before practice and afterward.

Not enough fuel makes for a very cranky and distracted practice—after all, no one wants to train when they're hungry. From my personal experience, it's much harder to push yourself physically and mentally if you're thinking about your grumbling stomach.

So whether going for a long run or jumping into practice for a sport, the

key to any sustained effort or exercise is carbohydrates. Two types of carbs are important to consider: simple and complex. While both help to restore your glycogen stores after training, they have some specific benefits as well.

Simple carbs are the ones we most often think about—simple sugars like glucose, fructose, and sucrose, found in bread, fruits, and table sugar, respectively. They primarily serve as a quick burst of energy. Complex carbs like starch and fiber, on the other hand, are typically found in plant-based foods like whole grains and starchy vegetables. These complex carbs take longer to break down, fueling your body and providing sustained energy over extended periods of time.

Carbohydrates, whether from a smoothie, banana, or an energy bar, can be a good way to fuel before a workout session or practice so that you can train more intensely or for a longer duration. The closer you get to a training session or race, the less protein and fat you should consume as these take longer to be broken down and may not be fully digested by the time you start.

It's typically advised that you eat some sort of meal prior that includes a mixture of carbs, proteins, and healthy fats. Depending on my mood, I go for the eggs, avocado, and toast combo or almond butter toast and fruits a few hours before exercising

and a combination of carbs or proteins anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour prior to the activity. Foods like bananas or an apple with peanut butter (or almond butter!) are some easy ideas to try.

And while these are general guidelines about what may work, whatever source of energy gets you moving and feeling your best changes from person to person. As a result, it's important to find what works best and build a routine over time. At the end of the day, the food that you eat is what fuels your everyday activity. And as a self-proclaimed foodie, hopefully, it tastes good too ;)



Electrolytes: These charged particles or ions are crucial in maintaining fluid balance, preventing cramping, and even regulating your muscle contractions. Important electrolytes include sodium, potassium, calcium, and magnesium. While many energy drinks advertise their electrolyte content, it's crucial to read labels and the list of ingredients to be aware of what you are consuming.



Caffeine: For those that are caffeine sensitive, these energy drinks with caffeine may not be the way to go. But if you find that caffeine wakes you up, many electrolyte-containing energy drinks also come with caffeine. It is important to remember not to consume too much caffeine, which is often associated with high blood pressure and increased heart rates.



Gels: For long-distance runs like marathons which are all about high speeds and sustained effort, fueling before and during the activity is important. Gels, the go-to choice for many long distance runners, are a packet of energy that can be squeezed into your mouth during a run. They are highly portable and are designed to deliver sugars like glucose and fructose that can be quickly absorbed to combat depleted glycogen stores. Depending on the type, gels may also contain caffeine, electrolytes, vitamins, and minerals.

DATE ENERGY BARS

Yields: 8 large bars/ 16 squares

Prep time: 15 min

Cook time: 15 min

Date bars are easy. You can make this recipe in no time at home once you've found your perfect dates and the sharp blades of a food processor.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup of seedless dates (12-15 whole, pitted dried dates)
- ¼ - ½ cup of dried fruits (of choice)
- 1 cup of nuts (of choice)
- 1 pinch of salt

Directions:

1. Blend ingredients together until thoroughly combined in a food processor. You may need to separate the dates if they start to clump together. Scrape the edges of the bowl and beneath the blade to make sure nothing is sticking. Continue processing until the ingredients gather into a ball.
2. Dump the dough onto a high walled baking vessel prepared with parchment paper. Press the dough with your hands until it forms a thick square, roughly 8"x8" in size.
3. If the dough is too wet, bake it in a preheated oven (350 F) for 5-20 minutes or until suitably dry
4. Transfer the dough into a cutting board and divide it into large bars or small squares as desired.

Notes:

If the chocolate bars are baked, be aware that the chocolate will melt and this will change the texture of the bars. Freezing also changes the texture of energy bars.

Chopped dates are not recommended for this recipe because they are often covered in cornstarch or sugar to prevent sticking

Energy bars can be stored in the fridge for up to two weeks with parchment, or wax, paper separating bars

Different nuts contribute to the different textures and flavors of these bars: cashew adds richness and a creamy taste; pea-

Suggested flavor combinations:

Blueberry

- 1 cup of dates
- ¼ - ½ cup dried blueberries
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon (optional)

Apple

- 1 cup of dates
- ¼ - ½ cup dried apples
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- ½ - 1 tsp ground cinnamon

Cherry

- 1 cup of dates
- ¼ - ½ cup dried unsweetened cherries
- 1 cup almonds
- ½ - 1 tsp ground cinnamon

PB & J -esque

- 1 cup of dates
- ½ cup dried raisins or cherries
- 1 cup peanuts

Chocolate

- 1 cup of dates
- ½ cup of almonds
- ½ cup of pecans/ walnuts
- 3 tablespoons chocolate (chips or chopped chocolate)*
- 2 tbsp cocoa unsweetened powder

