

Best Foods & Fitness Matchups

It's a common problem: You're going for the final stretch, looking for that extra push to help you burn just a few more calories, but suddenly you're out of gas. You're not alone. "The muscles maximally absorb nutrients from food during the first 30 minutes after a workout," says Roberta Anding, M.S., R.D., national spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association.

What to do? Fuel up with the right stuff before you hit the gym, and don't forget a recovery meal post-workout. Try one of these winning combinations before your next workout, and see if you don't find that extra oomph you've been missing.

Weight Training + Protein: Combining a high-protein diet with strength training can help dieters lose more weight — and you lose fat, not muscle. Protein not only builds muscles but it also helps repair them after a workout. "The winning combination is typically four grams of carbs for every one gram of protein (think skim chocolate milk, energy bars, a turkey sandwich on whole wheat)," says Anding.

Long Distance Running + Carbohydrates: For long workouts, the performance edge goes to people who have the most glycogen (the stored form of carbohydrates). When you eat pasta or other starchy food, the body converts those carbohydrates into muscle glycogen for fuel. Hence the reason marathoners "carbo-load" the night before a big race. The trouble comes in when you eat more carbs than you need, because unused carbs can also be stored as fat!

Aerobics, Kickboxing and Spinning + Fat: For activities that involve repetitive joint action, monounsaturated fats from fish, nuts, seeds and canola, olive and peanut oils can help lubricate the joints while also providing high-quality protein to power you through a workout. An added bonus: These fats also reduce post workout soreness and stiff muscles.

Yoga and Pilates + Complex Carbohydrates: The fiber from whole grains and vegetables slows the digestion of food, allowing your body more time to absorb critical nutrients. And since most yoga and Pilates classes require fasting for two hours before class, the long lasting effects of fiber will help sustain you through a few hours without food.