

Recovery nutrition: What to eat after a workout

Recovery nutrition is a critical part of any training programme. If you recover better, then you'll be able to train harder in your next workout. Failure to replenish fluid and fuel after training will result in sore muscles, fatigue and under-performance in your next workout. Here are my top post-exercise nutrition tips to help you recover faster.

Why is recovery nutrition important?

Exercise depletes your stores of glycogen (carbohydrate) and breaks down muscle tissue and these need to be replaced to recover properly. Good nutrition in the post-workout period will help your body to adapt to the stress imposed by exercise, so you can recover faster and get bigger gains in strength and endurance. Providing the body with the right nutrients will ensure your muscles have all the building blocks to recover and rebuild themselves stronger.

How should you recover?

A good rule of thumb is to follow the '**3 Rs of recovery**' after every workout.

- Rehydrate
- Refuel
- Rebuild

1. Rehydrate.

The exact amount you need to drink depends on how much fluid you have lost during your workout. Weigh yourself before and after training. For optimal rehydration, aim to replace each 1 kg of your weight (sweat) loss with [1.2 - 1.5 l fluid](#). If your fluid losses have been relatively small then water will do a perfectly good job replacing lost fluid. But if fluid losses have been high, then opt for a drink containing electrolytes, such as a sports drink. Alternatively, water

with salty food (e.g. cheese sandwich) will work equally well, and promote more effective fluid retention than water alone.

2. Refuel with carbs to replenish glycogen stores.

The harder and longer you trained the more carbohydrate you will need to replace. As a guide, high intensity endurance exercise, such as running, cycling and swimming, will deplete your glycogen more than low intensity activities, such as walking, jogging or yoga or strength and intermittent activities that include rest periods such as weight training or tennis. In other words, you'll need more carbohydrate after an endurance workout than a strength workout.

3. Rebuild with protein.

Protein repairs damaged muscle fibres and supports the formation of new muscle tissue. This doesn't necessarily need to be a protein shake - several studies have shown that food sources, such as dairy or soya milk, are just as effective for muscle recovery as protein supplements. Ideally, you want a 'high quality' or complete protein – one that contains all 8 essential amino acids – and one that's rich in the amino acid leucine. Milk, eggs, yogurt and soya are all suitable and will help your muscles recover faster before your next workout.

Your post-workout meal or snack should, ideally, include [0.25–0.4 g protein per kilogram of body weight](#), depending on the type and intensity of exercise you've done. Many studies have shown this to be the optimal amount to trigger muscle protein synthesis muscle building). But tailor this to suit your workout and your body weight - most studies were done with 85kg males! You'll need more following a strength or whole-body workout than following an endurance workout, but generally, [an intake between 20–40 g](#) will be suitable for most workouts. Get 20g protein from 3 eggs; 500ml milk; 250g strained Greek yogurt or 25g whey powder.

When should you eat?

If you have 24 hours or longer between workouts then there's [no urgency to consume food straight after training.](#)

Protein is not essential in the immediate post-exercise period but plays an important role in long term recovery and muscle building.

Be guided by your hunger and eat your post-exercise snack or meal when you feel hungry for it. Provided you consume enough calories, carbohydrate and protein over a 24-hour period, your muscles will recover before your next workout. [Caffeine also promotes glycogen storage](#) during the immediate post-exercise period so having a cup of coffee, though not essential, may be a good idea. But if you train twice a day, or the time interval between training sessions is less than 8 hours, then you need to take advantage of the 2-hour recovery window.

For rapid recovery after endurance training, aim to consume [1.0–1.2g of carbohydrate per kg body weight](#) (60–72g for a 60kg runner) each hour for 4 hours after exercise to maximise glycogen synthesis. This is equivalent to 300ml flavoured milk and a banana. This way you will ensure your glycogen stores are restored as fully as possible before your next workout.

What should you consume?

Cow's milk is a [near-perfect recovery drink](#) as it contains fluid along with protein and carbohydrate (as well as other nutrients) to promote rehydration, glycogen replenishment and muscle building. It has been shown to be [more effective than sports drinks for promoting rehydration](#).

Suitable recovery meals include:

- Breakfast: Overnight oats – soak oats, milk and yogurt overnight, then stir in banana slices, fresh berries and a few toasted almonds. Alternatively, poached eggs, avocado and toast would fulfil your recovery needs following a strength workout.
- Lunch: Pitta bread with hummus, falafels or tuna; avocado, rocket and beetroot.
- Dinner: Thai Green Chicken Curry or Black Bean and Sweet Potato Curry

Recovery snack options include:

- Milk with a banana – milk fulfils the 3Rs - promotes rehydration as effectively as sports drinks, also provides protein for muscle repair and carbs for refuelling muscles.
- Fruit and yogurt smoothie – Blend together 3 tbsp plain Greek yogurt, 1 banana, a handful of berries and 150ml milk in a blender.
- A 'yogurt bowl': Greek yogurt topped with berries, nuts or seeds

<https://anitabean.co.uk/recovery-nutrition-what-to-eat-after-a-workout/>