



Sport-Specific Nutrition: Track & Field

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Jen works with ICyF to provide expert advice on sports nutrition and healthy eating to the students and families of Indianola. As a board-certified sports dietitian, Jen owns a private practice that focuses on helping athletes stay on the cutting edge with superior nutrition to enhance performance with safety and efficacy.

Track and field athletes are required to work at a very high intensity for short durations. Sprinters, jumpers and throwers all use their anaerobic systems (PCr and Anaerobic glycolysis) for the majority of training and competition. These systems rely on your body to generate energy very quickly and require good overall nutrition to execute successfully. Track and field athletes must be able to perform at a high lactate level while focusing on speed, power, technique and flexibility.

Nutrition Recommendations for Track & Field Athletes*

Maintain a healthy weight.

It is recommended that track and field athletes* (other than throwers. Throwers, see the ICyF document for "Precision-sports") maintain a percent body fat that allows them to have a high power-to-weight ratio. Despite popular belief, track and field athletes* do not need as many carbohydrates as other athletes. Carbohydrate intake can be sufficient around 3-4 grams per kilogram of body weight. However, if you need to gain muscle mass for more power, additional carbohydrates may be needed.

In either case, select nutrient dense carbohydrates that offer the most nutrition per calorie.

Carbohydrate choice	Better carbohydrate choice
bagel	whole-wheat toast, English muffin or flat bread
rice	quinoa
100 % orange juice	orange
Pop - Tart®	Erin Baker® breakfast cookie
Soda/sports drink	Plain water

candy bar	almonds or peanuts
french fries/ potato chips	baked chips
white pasta	Whole grain pasta
crackers	Veggies and hummus
Sugary cereal	Oatmeal, healthier cereals*
* Healthier cereals found on ICyF "Athlete Shopping List" guide.	

The carbohydrates you consume will benefit you by keeping your energy level high and replacing the muscle glycogen utilized in your resistance training sessions. Resistance training sessions involving high repetitions (8-12 reps) with moderate loads have been shown to reduce glycogen stores by 20-40%. (1) These types of training sessions are usually done at the beginning of the season when coaches want athletes to build versus maintain muscle.

Refuel after training sessions.

To replace glycogen stores depleted during heavy trainings:

- eat something within 30 minutes of an event when muscle enzymes are most active.
- refuel with carbohydrates and a little bit of protein.

The amount of food to eat post-event will depend on your weight (0.5 – 1.5 grams carbohydrate per kg bodyweight.) and schedule. If you cannot eat a meal within 30 minutes, consume a snack. Some snack ideas include low-fat chocolate milk, peanut butter sandwich, meal replacement shake, or sports drink with string cheese.



• Eat lean protein.

Eat enough protein to build and/or maintain muscle. Lean protein sources include fat free and low fat dairy products, lean meat, beans and eggs. For a more detailed list see the ICYF “Athlete Shopping List.” Track athletes should consume at least 1.5 – 2.0 grams of protein per kilogram of bodyweight and no more than 1 gram of protein per pound of bodyweight each day.

Weight (pounds)	Daily Protein Range (grams)
140	95 - 127
150	102 - 136
165	113 - 150
180	124 - 165
200	136 - 182

• Stay hydrated.

Hydration before, during and after training should be well planned. Drinking large amounts of water in the minutes

**Track athletes that regularly run longer distances (3000+ meters) should seek nutrition advice similar to a cross country athlete by visiting the ICYF “Sport-Specific Nutrition: Cross Country” guide.*

References

1. Burke, Louise. *Practical Sports Nutrition*. Human Kinetics, Champaign, IL., 2007.

before a competitive event is not an optimal way to hydrate. Athletes should sip small amounts of fluid during training and regularly throughout the day.

Hydration Tips:

- Start hydrating about 4 hours before practice or competitions so that you can excrete any excess fluid as urine before you compete.
- If you are training for 60+ minutes, sip 4-6 ounces of fluid every 15 minutes. A sports drink may be necessary.
- On days where you are training intensely, for every pound lost, replace with 24 ounces of fluid.
- Carry a water bottle with you during the day to help achieve your fluid goals. One sip of water is equal to about 1 ounce.

For more information or a personalized plan, work with a registered dietitian/nutritionist that is board certified in sports dietetics.