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## Sweat it out and power it up!

Lauren O'Connor, Hollywood Healthy Food Examiner  
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You need fuel to exercise; balance and timing is everything!  
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Slideshow: "Fitness & health hinges on nutrition." — Heather Frey, owner/founder SmashFit

### You need fuel to exercise: balance and timing is everything! Are you getting the results that you desire?

A common equation: Eating Less + More Exercise = Weight Loss. But some experts beg to differ. And for good reason. The truth is: the equation projects only "weight loss", and that is simply achieved through calorie-deficit.

"Weight Loss = fewer Calories in than out. Nothing more, nothing less," says Michael Applebaum, MD, JD, FCLM, The Fitness Doc, Medical Director of the [Anabolic Clinic](#), SC - a clinical medical practice and President of [FitnessMed, Inc.](#) - a fitness consulting firm. "The source of the Calories is immaterial."

"If you eat 100 calories and 10g of protein from chicken and brown rice or the same amount of calories and protein from a fast food cheeseburger, the result on weight and fat loss remains the same," explains [Tony Paradis](#), Registered Dietitian and Personal Trainer. "Constructing a diet of 100% cheeseburgers will leave you devoid of many important vitamins, minerals and fiber. Those are important for health, just not necessarily for weight loss."

[Nancy Clark](#), author of Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook, says that weight loss is best achieved through diet, but reminds us that exercise does play a role in maintaining good health.

"It is important to separate exercise from weight loss. Calorie deficit through diet is more powerful," says Clark. "While, exercise is important for weight maintenance, muscle mass and overall health, it is not the preferred way to reach your calorie deficit goals. Women have a tendency to overeat afterward as exercise can stimulate the appetite."

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So why put exercise in the equation - and - if the source of calories is unimportant for 'weight loss', why focus on **diet and exercise** when seeking weight loss to improve our health? Because if we focus on long-term health, exercise and diet can be the foundation to improved longevity.

Weight loss is one thing, keeping that weight off for the long term is another. "Not every calorie is created equal - the bulk of your diet should be wholesome, nutritious foods in order to achieve sustained weight loss, improved health and satiety," says [Theresa DiMasi](#), VP Editor and Chief at [WeightWatchers.com](#) "Eating well and exercising are two key strategies important for long-term success."

"Going by 'Calories IN, Calories OUT', one can only go so low," says [Sharon Richter, RD](#). "The other part of the equation is EXERCISE because it improves the metabolism by increasing lean muscle mass," she says.

#### HEALTHY DIET AND EXERCISE: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

"Muscle strength is important to the overall functionality of our body and will go a long way toward helping us perform daily activities for many years," says [Ann A. Rosenstein M.A.](#), author of *Diet Myths Busted: Food Facts Not Nutrition Fiction* and ACE certified Group Fitness Instructor. Eating right, gives us the fuel we need to perform better. Better performance leads to improved benefits such as endurance, strength and motivation to keep moving.

So what is all the talk about exercising on empty? An article in [ebsonewletter.com](#) discussed the evidence for and against the claim that fat burning may be accelerated on an empty stomach (citing a study published in the *International Journal of Sports Medicine*). The body digs into its fat reserves when glycogen stores are empty. However other studies confirm that healthful re-fueling (within 3 hours) prior to exercise can go a long way in ensuring a good, healthy workout (*Journal of Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*). Furthermore, many fitness experts agree that "running on empty" doesn't jump-start the metabolism.

Without readily available fuel, you may not feel too energetic - thus less likely to feel motivated to sustain a good, solid workout. Running on empty often translates to a short and unproductive workout, according to Yvonne Nienstadt, Nutrition Director at Rancho La Puerta Fitness Resort and Spa.

To snack or not to snack

While a snack just prior to your workout may not be necessary, most experts would agree that 100-300 calories of mostly carbs won't hurt you or your exercise performance.

"Most people have enough fuel (glycogen and fat cells) to convert to glucose to fuel the exercise, says [Erin](#)

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[Macdonald](#), Nutrition, Fitness, and wellness coach and President of [U Rock Girl!](#). The purpose (of a light snack) is to "top of the tank" with the food boosting the blood sugar and energy level up enough to provide ample available energy to fuel the exercise," says MacDonald.

"If tolerated, and it has been more than 3 hours since eating anything, then a light meal should be eaten before a workout, says Macdonald. But not much more than that.

"Digestion is put on hold when your body is in workout mode. Therefore, a heavy meal or snack will sit in your stomach and can cause nausea or even vomiting during a workout," explains [Jennifer Cassetta](#), LA-based fitness and nutrition expert or personal trainer and nutritionist.

While many people feel better (more energized) if they have a small snack before they workout, it need not be necessary, according to [Ed Boullianne](#), Author / Presenter "You Can't Outsource Weight Loss". "The key to weight loss is managing your blood sugar level so your body is tapping those fat stores for energy." That is why Boullianne suggests learning to eat right so you don't need to snack before you work out.



Balancing your intake over the course of the day

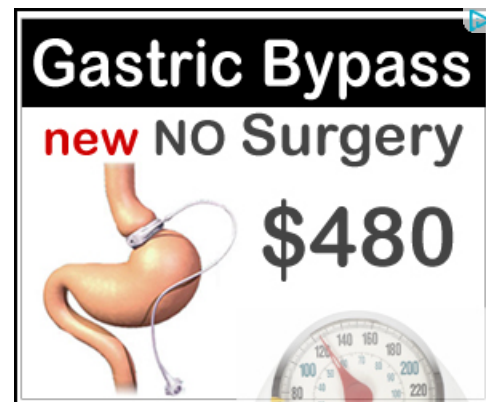
"Eating protein every 3-4 hours will help keep your blood sugar levels steady," says [Stephanie Mansour](#), CEO of Step It Up with Steph, Health & Fitness Expert and Body Image & Confidence Coach and creator of the 30 Day Workbook, "30 Days to Love Your Body and Your Life." Macdonald recommends a combination of complex carbs (whole grain, fruit, vegetable) and a lean protein within this time frame. And because your bodies preferred source of energy comes from carbs, Clark suggests to construct your meals/snacks using a base of carbohydrate complimented with a little protein.

Since both energy and satiety help support our healthy habits (ie: exercise, portion control, avoiding empty calories), the type of food does matter. Timing is also key. "Eat a protein and a carb *before and after* your workout: one 'fills', the other 'replenishes'," says [Heather Frey](#), owner/founder of SmashFit and Fitness X-pert for NBC show "*Miami Moms*".

*Pre-workout*

was drugged

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"Eat light if you are working out first thing in the morning and then have your real breakfast afterward," says Cassetta who advises her clients to eat something easily digested such as a banana, apple, handful of berries or a piece of whole grain toast.

Clark calls this '*backing your meal into your workout*'. "Break up your meal to have some carbs to fuel your workout and the remainder of your breakfast to replenish your energy and protein needs." For a morning workout, she suggests a banana (carbohydrate) within an hour of exercise, followed by cereal and milk (carbohydrate with protein) 30-60 minutes post workout. "Choose carbs as your foundation, accompanied by a little protein for optimal results," she says.

#### *Post workout*

"The most important meal is your post workout meal," says Macdonald. "These meals are the most effective way to replenish your energy stores (glycogen) and to heal and synthesize new muscle protein. What you eat DOES matter. The combination of carb and protein during the meals consumed post-workout are the most effective in completing these tasks."

"Post workout snacks should be within 90 minutes of the workout and should include carbohydrates as well as protein," says Cassetta. Healthy snack options include:

- low-fat Greek yogurt with berries
- a banana with a TBS of natural peanut butter
- an apple with peanut/almond butter
- a hand-full of trail mix
- a hard boiled egg with a few whole grain crackers

Richter suggests consuming 45 minutes post workout. "This is a critical window when your metabolism is most efficient. Muscles will benefit most within this time of repletion and it will help prevent lactic acid buildup/muscle soreness."

While there may be no hard and fast rule as to an exact timing, the expert consensus is generally within 30-90 minutes post workout. Boullianne states it simply. "By the time you stretch, cool off and shower, you're generally ready to eat."

#### THE BOTTOM LINE

"A healthy diet that is proportional to our activity level combined with an exercise program work better together rather than separately to produce the long-term results we all seek," says Rosenstein.

#### *Plan, plan plan.*

"Healthy eating (for most people) doesn't happen spontaneously. It requires planning out the meals for the day, as well as putting together meal/snack combinations that feature a healthy carb (veggies, fruit, whole grains), a smart protein (eggs/whites, beans, fish, tofu, poultry, nonfat dairy) and some health fat (olive oils, nuts, avocados). Planning

ensures that it will happen, and prevents falling victim to poor food choices (ie: dining out, fast food, vending machines)," says Macdonald.

*Listen your body.*

"Pay attention to your body," says DiMasi. "Gage and experiment. A light snack may be necessary pre-workout in the morning since you've been fasting all night, however in the evening (after a full day of nutrient intake), it may really not be necessary."

*Workout wisely.*

Don't work out on a full stomach, it may make you queasy and less energetic. But do make sure you have enough fuel by eating *(a healthy balance of carbs, protein and healthy fats)* 3-4 hours prior. If necessary, partake in a light, carbohydrate-based snack just before your workout. And be sure to replete with not only carbs (for energy), but also lean proteins; these will help maintain your muscle/tissue integrity and keep you satiated.

*And Finally, Get some sleep!*

"Numerous recent studies show that insufficient sleep will BOTH slow your metabolism AND create more unhealthy junk food cravings" according to [Sean Folkson](#), NightFood founder. There is a critical relationship between nutrition, sleep and metabolism. He cites the following:

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/11/09/health/webmd/main654548.shtml>

<http://www.ajcn.org/content/early/2011/04/06/ajcn.110.006460.abstract>

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So sweat it out and power it up, using these healthy guidelines to fuel your success!

Suggested by the author:

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