



Carbohydrates are of ultimate importance to athletes, especially for gymnasts! They are the main energy-providing nutrient for both the mind and the body.

By choosing foods high in carbohydrates for your meals and snacks, you can ultimately improve your strength, endurance, and overall energy levels as well as your motivation, concentration and attitude throughout your practice.

There are two types of carbohydrates: complex carbohydrates and simple sugars. Both types of carbohydrates travel to the blood (simple sugars faster than complex) and are then called blood sugar. Once in the blood, those sugars are used primarily for fueling the brain and muscles. If the blood sugar is too low, our brain calls upon a small reserve of energy in the liver called liver glycogen. After that reserve tank is empty, the body begins to break down muscle protein to make fuel for the brain. This is the last thing gymnasts want!

You need every bit of your muscle strength to be a strong gymnast. When you're training, you use blood sugar for concentration and muscle glycogen for your physical strength. A high carbohydrate meal after gymnastics practice is very important because this is how you refuel your muscles for the next day's practice. Choose dinners that contain pasta, beans, potato, bread, fruit and/or milk. If you choose a high fat or high protein meal (like fast food), your muscles will not be replenished and you'll feel fatigued and lethargic soon after your next day's practice begins. If you eat carbohydrate-containing foods for meals and snacks and do not skip any meals, this will not happen to you. See "Winning Carbohydrates" for a list of foods that contain this main energy nutrient.

Winning Carbohydrates

Grains & Starches

Bagels
Breads
Cereals
English Muffins
Graham Crackers
Pancakes
Pasta

Baked or Mashed Potato
Sweet Potato
Brown Rice
Corn & Peas
Pita Bread
Low fat Crackers
Corn or Whole Wheat Tortillas

Fruit & Vegetables

Apples
Broccoli
Bananas
Fruit Juices
Nectarines
Strawberries
Sherbet
Green & Red Peppers
Grapes
Mangos
Tomatoes
Pears
Asparagus
Pineapple
Diary
Milk & Yogurt*
Skim & 1% Milk*
Chocolate Milk*
Soy Milk
Pudding
Frozen Yogurt
Fruited Yogurt*

**also a good source of protein*

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