
DO YOU NEED A SNACK DURING PRACTICE?

By Kim LaPiana, MS, RD

If your practice lasts longer than three hours, then you probably need a snack to help you perform your best. During gymnastics practice your brain needs constant energy to help you concentrate and stay motivated. Your body needs energy to help its muscles give you power and strength.

When you run out of energy for your mind and body, you become tired and unmotivated. This will happen after two to two-and-a-half hours of practice because your glycogen stores become depleted. Pretty soon the instructions your coach is giving you do not make much sense. All you can think about is making it to the end of practice. This is also the same time when most injuries occur!

A small snack eaten after two and a half hours will help you refuel your muscles and brain to finish your practices motivated and strong! This will also help reduce your risk of injury during the last portion of practice. Plan a convenient snack that is high in carbohydrates. Cereals, breads, crackers, fruits and vegetables are all high in carbohydrates and are digested much easier than protein and fat during exercise. Look for items easy to throw into your gym bag, that will not make a mess or spoil and are easy to eat. Try a different one each day for better taste and nutrient appeal. See the list of Energy Boosters for some ideas.

Offer a snack to your coach as well. He or she probably could use a little pick-me-up about the same time you do! Be aware of your attitude and energy levels after you've had your snack until the end of practice. You'll notice an improvement the first day.

You may also need a snack prior to starting practice if it begins more than two hours from your last meal. For example, lunch is eaten at 11:30 a.m. and practice starts at 3:00 p.m. A snack will help top off your energy reserves so that you can perform at your peak potential. Try a half sandwich and a glass of milk, a fruit smoothie, a bean burrito, or even a baked potato topped with grated cheese and salsa. It's a good idea to include a little protein with this snack so your blood sugar levels last longer.

3 Notes for Coaches

- Snack break can be a short break between rotations and doesn't have to take up too much valuable practice time!
- Sports drinks can also serve as an energy refueler in addition to food and can be kept in your gymnast's water bottle.
- Although it takes a few minutes from practice, you will see the benefits of giving your gymnasts a small snack break in their performance and attitude.

Energy Boosters:

High Carbohydrate Snacks to Eat During Practice

A few orange wedges
Handful of Cheerios
A few pieces of dried fruit
Handful of dried cranberries
Half of a banana
1/2 of a bagel
6 ginger snap cookies
Baby carrots
Sports drink
10 bing cherries
A few bites of a sports bar
Small apple
Fruit roll-up
15 frozen grapes
6 vanilla wafers
Handful of pretzels or popcorn

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