



Do you have a health-related question to ask the USA Gymnastics Health Care Referral Network? If so, send it to USA Gymnastics magazine, Pan American Plaza, 201 S. Capitol Ave., Suite 300, Indianapolis, IN 46225.

Q. What is considered a good diet for gymnasts? I'm an optional gymnast and I don't know how to eat right. Last summer I lost too much weight and I don't want that to happen again. I would like to know when is the best time to eat before a 4:00 p.m. workout and after, and how many grams of fat and calories should

I be getting? I saw a nutritionist but I would like a second opinion. THANKS

A. When you look at the best diet for a gymnast, you want one that fuels your muscles for the work they have to do for the sport. The preferred fuel is carbohydrates! Our muscles and brain run on carbohydrates like potatoes, pasta, corn, beans, fruits and vegetables. We certainly know we need to have a balance of protein to also make sure we keep our muscles strong and some fat to make sure our bodies and nervous system run correctly.

As for the timing of meals, if your workout is at 4:00 p.m. try to eat a snack of carbohydrate and a little protein around 2:30-3:00 p.m. This would be ideal. An example of this would be a bagel with a little peanut butter and apple juice or fruited yogurt and some crunchy pretzels. This would provide you some carbohydrates for your muscles to use during practice and hopefully it would be digested easily so it doesn't sit in your stomach. Some gymnasts prefer a fruit smoothie before workout. After workout, it is just as important to make sure you replenish your muscles with fluid like fruit juice, milk or water and carbohydrates and protein like a bean burrito or bowl of cereal with a banana.

The ideal calorie amount is hard for me to say without knowing some things about you, but in general, remember to eat small meals every 3-4 hours of at least 300 calories (this is the minimum to support blood sugar). Fat is always an issue to watch. The best guideline would be typically to keep fat low by reading labels and eat under 35 grams per day.

I always hesitate to put guidelines down like this because we want fuel for the body (food) to remain fun to eat and nourishing. Remember there are no good foods and no bad foods! As you are still growing, we want nutrition for building, too.

I hope this helps. A good book is Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook. It is written for athletes, although not specific for gymnasts. She has good suggestions for how to fuel our bodies to get the proper carbohydrates and protein!

Good Luck! Patti Tveit Milligan, MS, RD

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