



Solving the Pre-Game Meal Misunderstanding Once and For All

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It's important to understand that while yes, the choice you make for your pre-game meal can have a huge impact on your ability to perform just hours later, it's just as important to look at the contribution the last few days' worth of eating can have on the game you'll play today. Pre-game meals are usually given such focused attention because it is usually the last thing you put into your body before taking the field. However, if we were to look at weight training in the same way, we'd mistakenly think that the rebound that you just grabbed was a direct result of the last set of squats you did in the workout the day before the game.

Do you think that's true? Of course it's not. The fact that you were able to out-leap three or four other guys to pull that ball down had more to do with the consistent efforts and hours you've been putting in in the weight room for the last eight months to gradually build up your lower body strength and power with hundreds of sets of squats...not to mention lunges, step-ups, and plyometrics. You see? So, in much the same way, while your pre-game meal is significant and important, how you've eaten and fueled your body on a consistent basis leading up to that day has just as much, if not more of an impact on how much energy you'll have in today's game.

Consistently good eating habits provide your muscles with several days' worth of glycogen building nutrients. It's much easier for your muscles to absorb and store this key energy source when it's delivered with steady doses of usable glucose as opposed to flooded with it from some pre-workout or pre-game gimmicky "Super Carbo Charger Sugar Shock Extreme" drink. Eating right for days leading up to your game is much more effective than short-term attempts to "do the right thing" last minute.

That said, what I'm trying to accomplish by the time you're done reading is to make you realize that this glycogen depot is not only best built overtime, but that building it isn't as hard as you may think. Remember, it's the small changes that will ultimately lead to big differences, especially when it comes to the energy you're able to bring to competition each and every time you suit up.

Now while the pre-game meal won't necessarily lead to large increases in this stored form of energy, the right one will:

- Stabilize the blood sugar levels you've maintained up to that point in the day (with your timed eating), preventing any roller coaster like peaks or dips in your energy levels during the game.
- Provide some immediate usable energy from the circulating blood sugar it creates.

- And help you to avoid in-game hunger that is strong enough to distract you from the task at hand.

Not all pre-game snacks are created equal...both in their makeup and in their level of portability. Think about it, since half of the time you are going to be on the road playing away games, you're going to want to have something that you can rely on that can easily be taken with you on the bus. Foods requiring an oven, a recipe book, or a sous chef to help you prepare are obviously not good choices. Instead, you're going to need to find old standbys that you can eat at home and away, that make you feel energetic without bogging you down.

Let's take a look first at some of the guidelines that you'll want to follow in creating the perfect pre-game snack and then we'll look specifically at what I consider my top selections for game day that I affectionately call my "Five For Fueling".

A good pregame snack should follow my "7 Sacred Principles of Pep"...They are:

1. Start with starch – Starch is easy to digest and helps to keep blood sugar levels steady.
2. Trim the fat – Fats and oils slow down digestion and can leave you feeling too full and bloated at game time. What makes this worse is that your digestion is usually already slowed down due to your emotionally keyed-up state.
3. Shut out the sweets – Sweets and simple sugars can cause too quick of a blood sugar elevation, leaving you only to crash from your high later on...unfortunately most likely in crunch time!
4. Cut the caffeine – Many athletes reach for caffeine as a pre-game boost, but this perceived energy jolt is often short term and can quickly leave you dehydrated.
5. Add water – Never consume a pre-game meal (or any meal for that matter) without having a glass of water with it as well. It helps to aid the digestion and leaves you less likely to get stomach cramps later.
6. Digest the rest – Try not to eat immediately before competition. It's better to leave at least 60 to 90 minutes between your snack time and your attack time, if you know what I mean!
7. Win – That's what you're doing steps 1 to 6 for, right? Then go get that "W"!

With this in mind I now introduce to you, as promised, my "Five For Fueling" Top 5 Pre-Game meals. In order to make the cut, each of these winners had to meet the above criteria and also be what I like to call "bus friendly". I figured, if it can stand up to the road test, then it's going to be a-ok at home as well.

FIVE FOR FUELING – TOP 5 PRE-GAME MEALS!

1. Banana and a bag of pretzels with bottled water
2. Soup and crackers (in a Thermos) with bottled water
3. Turkey Sandwich on whole wheat bread with bottled water

4. Breadsticks (3) and a yogurt with bottled water

5. Low Protein (low sugar) energy bar with bottled water

The point is....regardless what you choose, not only are wise choices needed in the hours leading up to tip off, kick off, or faceoff...but perhaps more importantly, a pattern of consistently good choices is vital if you want to bring your best game...EVERY GAME!