

Snack Like a Pro

By Brandi Givens, RDN



The right snacks can give a player the winning advantage on tournament days. Think of snacks as healthy mini-meals, following these general rules:

Before exercise

- ✓ Focus on carbohydrates. 1-4 grams of carbs/kg body weight, 1-4 hours prior to exercise. The closer to tournament time, the lighter the fare should be.
- ✓ Example: 1 hour prior to tournament, a 180-lb. athlete might eat: ¼ cup oatmeal cooked in 1 cup soy beverage, mixed with ¼ cup dried cherries, plus 8 oz. glass of orange juice = 86g carbs.
- ✓ A little protein, fat, or fiber will keep you feeling full longer. Go light to avoid gut distress.
- ✓ Example: Add a handful of walnuts to oatmeal.

During 1+ hours of play

- ✓ Replace carbohydrates. For every hour of intense exercise, consume 30g of carbs.
- ✓ Examples: 1 banana, or 2 whole-grain fig bars, or a mini bagel with peanut butter.
- ✓ Replace electrolytes and fluids. 14-27 oz./hour of sports drinks, or water with salty snacks.

I had a great time at the International Indoor Pickleball Championships in Centralia, WA, asking a few top players how they fuel before and during matches...

Peter Hudachko: Veggie wraps, cheese, avocados, almond butter

Takako Tourangeau: Low-added-sugar, high-protein energy bars

Michelle Esquivel and Glen Peterson: Bananas

Enrique Ruiz: Homemade pasta, juicy fruit including watermelon, blueberries, grapes

Morgan Evans: Trail mix, sandwiches

Brian Ashworth enjoys a variety of pre-game foods including yogurt mixed with granola and peanut butter, or crackers with hummus, but his must-have match snack is pickles "because they're delicious."

Delicious always gets gold in my book, Brian!

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together and there's no nagging because LeEllen is a "great eater." Her favorite food is sushi.

Living and playing in the south means friendship is more important than food. Bart Brannon of Wildwood, GA, notes that when he walks into Popeye's, they start cooking his order. "I'm a regular and they know what I want," he says. He eats a good meal the night before he plays, but doesn't between matches. Instead, he drinks a 5-Hour Energy after his first match and keeps a towel on ice with ammonia in his cooler. Fried chicken and fries are his specialty. He once drove 25 miles off the Ohio interstate to eat at Canes Chicken. I was a witness! Bart plays a lot of tournaments in Mississippi and Louisiana, where Canes and Popeye's leave the lights on for him.

Colorado's Cherie Chao is the other extreme. Cherie works as a dietitian in Cardiac Rehab and, as a result, has become a whole food, plant-based eater. Besides the health benefits, Cherie loves animals and is concerned for the health of the planet. She avoids all animal products and most processed foods. Her diet consists of legumes, whole grains, fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds.

When traveling, Cherie finds it easier to take a lot of food with her. She starts her day (whether home or at a tournament) with a bowl of whole grains, usually oatmeal topped with berries, dried fruit and a mixture of flax meal, hemp and chia seeds, almonds, walnuts and pumpkin seeds. This is a great start because it's loaded with protein, fiber and other nutrients. She says it's important to eat the same foods in competition as you do in training. It's what your body is used to, which makes you less apt to have any gastrointestinal issues. This breakfast is easy to pack in baggies and take on the road.

Other foods in her suitcase include peanut butter, dried fruits, nuts, Tetra packs of ethnic foods such as Channa Masala, Madras Lentils, quinoa and brown rice. Once off the plane, she heads to the grocery store for fresh fruit, veggies, hummus, edamame, sweet potatoes, soy milk, V8 tomato juice (great sodium and potassium) and 100-percent whole-grain bread. Her lunches and snacks are usually veggies and hummus, edamame, peanut butter and banana sandwich, fruit, dried fruits, nuts and water. She often joins others at night for a meal out at a restaurant—there are choices at almost all restaurants, especially ethnic. Just look for legumes and veggies, bean or lentil soups, and salads work great (hold the cheese). •