

Your Perfect Eating Plan

How to eat right every day to make sure you have the energy you need, when you need it most. BY ALYSSA SHAFFER

GROUND RULES Whether you're playing in a tournament, following a light practice schedule, or playing just once a week, you need to follow a few basic nutrition guidelines. "There really shouldn't be a huge difference in your diet between training day and game day," says Nancy Clark, M.S., R.D., author of *Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook*. "Part of training is knowing what foods will work best for you, so that when you're playing a match you know what your body can tolerate."

Rule No. 1: Fall (back) in love with carbs

All tennis players should make sure they're getting enough quality carbohydrates in their diets. "High-protein fads have no place in an athlete's training menu," says Clark, who adds that carbs such as cereals, breads, and pasta should serve as the basis for every meal. "Fruits, vegetables, and grains should make up about 75 percent of your plate, with the balance devoted to proteins like dairy products or lean meats."

Surprisingly, even world-class players tend to skimp on carbs. Nutritionist Page Love, a consultant to the USTA and founder and president of Nutrifit Sport Therapy in Atlanta, says that many players she works with on the Sony Ericsson WTA Tour fail to get adequate carbs in their diets. "Carbohydrates fuel high-intensity work, which gives you the energy you need to cover the court," she says.

Ideally, most of these carbs should come in the form of whole grains such as whole-wheat bagels, breads, or pasta, brown rice, and oatmeal, or through fruits and vegetables. Look for vegetables that are loaded with nutrients, such as broccoli, spinach, peppers, tomatoes, and carrots. "Try to eat a variety of colors of fruits and vegetables," Clark says. "Red strawberries or peppers, green grapes or peas, blue or purple berries or eggplant, orange mangos or carrots, yellow pineapple or corn, and white onions or bananas."

According to Love, active players should aim for about 8–12 servings of grains, 4–8 servings of fruits, and 3–5 servings of vegetables a day. You'll also want about 2–3 portions of lean meats or beans and 2–4 servings of milk or dairy, plus at least one tablespoon of vegetable fat such as olive oil each day.



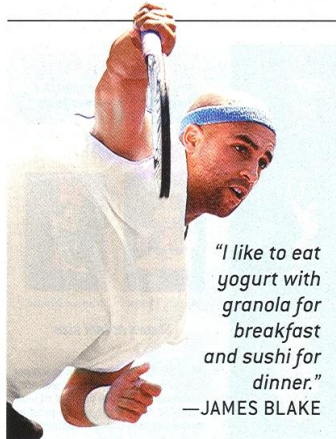
Rule No. 2: Always eat breakfast Of all the nutrition mistakes you can make, skipping breakfast is the biggest. "A high-energy breakfast sets the stage for a high-energy day," Clark says. Choose a breakfast like cereal and milk, low-fat granola and yogurt, or whole-wheat toast and peanut butter.

"I love Asian food. When it comes to food that's both healthy and tasty, it can't be beaten. I love the sashimi salad at Nobu. I always have it when I go, followed by black cod and sushi. I usually try a new dish each time I go, but these are my favorites. I especially enjoy playing in Japan because the food there is so good."

— ANA IVANOVIC



Rule No. 3: Eat often Keeping your body fueled is key to maintaining high energy levels. "You should feel hungry every three to four hours," Clark says. That means if you have breakfast at 7, you'll need a snack by 10, lunch by 1, another snack around 4, dinner at 7, and maybe a small snack by 10. According to Clark, an active woman should consume about 2,400 calories per day; for men, the number is closer to 3,000.



"I like to eat yogurt with granola for breakfast and sushi for dinner."

— JAMES BLAKE

Rule No. 4: Pay attention to key nutrients

Although a balanced diet should provide you with all the nutrients you need for performance, a few merit special attention. For example, B vitamins (such as thiamin, riboflavin, and niacin) are important for keeping energy levels high. "They're called the energy vitamins because they're important in the process of breaking food down for energy," Love says. "The more active you are, the more your body burns through them." Fortified foods such as breads and cereals are usually the richest sources of these vitamins.

In addition, women need adequate amounts of calcium in their diets to strengthen bones. Most women should aim for three servings of calcium-rich foods a day, like yogurt, soy milk, low-fat milk, or cheese. They also must replenish iron supplies with foods like lean meats, chicken, fish, and beans.



MATCH DAY When tournament time comes, it's crucial to be aware of what you're putting into your body and when—whether it's before, during, or after play.

Rule No. 5: Drink before you hit the court

Hydration is critical to playing your best. Limit coffee, soda, and other caffeinated beverages right before and after play, since they can be dehydrating, and drink 17–20 ounces of fluids a couple of hours before game time. Bring at least 2 liters of chilled sports drink or water to the match, and aim to drink a minimum of 4–8 ounces of fluid per changeover. Weigh yourself before and after play, then drink 16–24 ounces (2–3 cups) of water after match time for every pound of body weight lost.



"I love eating sushi. The portions are small and I like taking friends. My favorite is the shrimp tempura roll. I almost always order it in combination with other things."

—NICOLE VAIDISOVA



Rule No. 6: Say hello to sodium Sodium is vital to sweat replenishment, so sports drinks can help you maintain levels of this electrolyte. If you prefer food, have a 120-calorie serving of a salty snack before or during play. "Eating [salty] foods can be more helpful than a sports beverage alone, especially if your energy levels are low," Love says.



Rule No. 7: Keep the carbs coming

According to Love, athletes who play stop-and-start sports like tennis over several hours can benefit from bite-size servings of quick-energy carbs, such as a sports beverage or energy bar. Since drinks are usually faster to digest, try experimenting with them first in your training routine to see how your body will handle them on game day.

"I try to eat a balanced diet. Of course, I like sweet things, but when I'm in training or during tournaments I keep it pretty healthy. I don't have one favorite dish, but I like what my mom cooks."

—JELENA JANKOVIC



Rule No. 8: Recover right Consider the 30-minute to two-hour period after you play your "recovery window," when muscles refuel best. Drink a sports drink as soon as possible after the match, then try a carb-protein combo such as a fruit smoothie made with yogurt or protein powder, chocolate milk, or an apple and a cheese stick, Clark says. "You don't need to consume a lot of food—even just 100 calories can make a big difference in helping you recover more quickly."

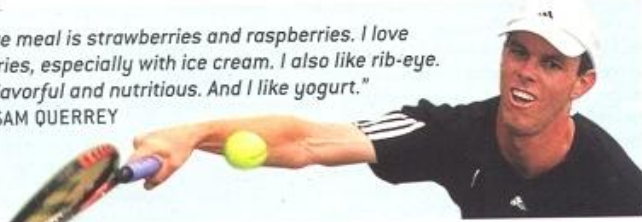


TENNIS.COM

To see recipes for nutritious, protein-packed smoothies and banana bread, go to TENNIS.com.

"My favorite meal is strawberries and raspberries. I love those berries, especially with ice cream. I also like rib-eye. It's very flavorful and nutritious. And I like yogurt."

—SAM QUERREY



GETTY IMAGES

Sample Daily Menu

Breakfast:

- 1 cup orange juice
- Whole-grain bagel with light cream cheese
- Latte with low-fat milk



Morning snack:

- 1 cup low-fat fruit yogurt
- 1 banana

Lunch:

- 3-ounce turkey sandwich with lettuce and light mayo
- 1 cup baby carrots
- 4 ounces of pretzels

Afternoon snack:

- 1 apple
- 1 serving of string cheese

MATCH-DAY ADDITIONS

Pre-tennis fuel-up:

- 4 ounces of whole-wheat crackers
- 8 ounces of sports drink

Post-tennis recovery:

- 8-ounces of low-fat chocolate milk
- Several cups of water

Dinner:

- 2–3 slices of cheese and vegetable pizza
- 1/4 cup low-fat cottage cheese with raw vegetables like carrots and celery, or salad with noncreamy dressing
- or 12 pieces of sushi or maki (limiting avocado, egg, spicy mayo, and tempura)
- Edamame, miso soup, or ginger salad
- 1 cup applesauce or chopped fruit



Evening snack:

- Low-fat ice cream with berries

Throughout the day, aim to drink at least 64 ounces of fluids.

Note: This menu was provided by nutritionist Page Love, founder of Nutrifit Sport Therapy in Atlanta. Menu suggestions depend on body size, gender, age, and level of activity. For best results, consult a registered dietitian for an eating plan that meets your needs.