



## WASPS

### Nutritional information for competitive swimmers

The nutritional needs of athletic children are of great importance to their overall growth, development and sporting performance. The well nourished child will be able to swim better and recover more quickly from training and competition. Swimmers who do not get the correct nutrition will become tired, irritable and lethargic.

#### Importance of carbohydrates

Carbohydrates keep blood sugar levels constant. The body can only store a limited amount of carbohydrate so it is important to have one of these foods at every meal and in snacks to top up energy. Training depletes energy reserves so it is important to ensure that carbohydrates are eaten before and after swimming.



Good sources of carbohydrate are bread, pasta, rice, cereals, and noodles. Potatoes are also a good source of carbohydrate but can be too heavy to eat before swimming

#### Importance of protein

Protein provides the building blocks for a child's growth. It also helps repair wear and tear on the body and keeps the immune system healthy to fight infection.



Good sources of protein are lean meat, fish, eggs, milk, yogurt, baked beans, kidney beans and nuts.

#### Iron and calcium

Iron and calcium are essential nutrients for all children and are especially important for young female swimmers. Iron is responsible for carrying oxygen in the blood and maximises energy levels.

The best sources of iron are lean red meats and green leafy vegetables, lentils, beans and breakfast cereals. The body cannot absorb iron without Vitamin C, so it is essential to include foods such as strawberries, oranges, fruit juice with iron rich foods.

Calcium is the mineral that make bones strong and healthy. Active children should be encouraged to eat 2-3 servings of dairy or fortified soy foods every day. Foods such as milk, yogurt, cheese, tinned fish (sardines or salmon are best) and green leafy veg are good sources of calcium.

#### Fats

All active children need a small amount of fat for their development. It is advised by dieticians that saturated fats (found in animal fat and especially processed foods, such as ready meals, fast food, biscuits) are limited. Healthier fats (unsaturated) found in foods like oily fish (salmon, sardines, and mackerel), nuts, seeds and avocados are very important.



#### Snacks

Snacks contribute significantly to a child's intake, so it is important to encourage good nutritional choices so that the best value is obtained from them.

Good snacks include; fruit, tinned or fresh, yogurt, smoothies, breakfast cereal, toast with peanut butter, beans or spaghetti hoops, cereal bars. Sweets and chocolate should not form part of your child's nutrition but should be offered as occasional treats.

#### Fluids

Managing liquid intake is just as important as food. Getting young swimmers into the habit of taking regular fluids is extremely important.



Dehydration can be a common problem, especially in a heated pool and may be a contributing factor in cramp.

Remind your child to keep up their fluid intake by taking mouthfuls often, before, during and after swimming, as well as during the day at home or school.

Water is the most recommended fluid, as it is used quickly by the body.

However flavoured sports drinks may encourage children to drink. Drinks that contain lots of sugar and especially fizzy drinks should be avoided, especially before and during swimming.



### What to eat and when

#### Before training or a gala

Ideally about 2 hours before a session a light meal is advised. Especially good is pasta or rice, but heavy creamy sauces and fried or fatty foods should be avoided.

If there is less time before a session, 1-2 hours; plain rice or pasta, toast, a sandwich, or cereal and fruit are good options.

Less than one hour before a session or gala it is important to encourage fluids – water, juice, sports drink. A small low fat snack such as a banana, fruit or a fruit bar may be a good idea.



#### During a gala

Encourage your child to have a drink to take

between warm up and their race. A couple of mouthfuls every 15 minutes should be enough. It is important that they drink after their race as well. It is important to tell your child to drink more if they are feeling thirsty – if they are thirsty they are dehydrated!

Good fluids are water or sports drinks.

Snacks for poolside should be

small; a piece of banana, fruit bars or energy gels are good.



**All day events** For long, all day events such as county championships it is advised that you take a packed lunch for your child that includes some of the good foods on this sheet. Please do not rely on vending machines or local fast food for lunch in between sessions as these will not provide good nutritional options.

#### After swimming

After swimming is when larger meals should be eaten. More nutritious fresh, balanced meals that consist of complex carbohydrate, protein and vegetables will refuel the body with the nutrients it needs.

Remember that swimmers need to replace fluids after training or a gala.



#### Dehydration

You and your child should know the warning signs of dehydration. Be alert for:

- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Muscle cramps
- Nausea and a headache
- Thirst

Any of these signs mean that the swimmer needs some fluid.

Parents should be alert for:

- Dark urine or not going to toilet as normal
  - Child has dry mouth and throat
- These mean that your child needs more fluids.

#### Resources

Sports Dieticians of Australia

[www.sportsdieticians.com](http://www.sportsdieticians.com)

British Nutrition Foundation

[www.nutrition.org.uk](http://www.nutrition.org.uk)

**This sheet is for your information only.**

**If you would like more advice please ask your child's coach.**

**If your child has specific dietary needs or allergies please seek advice from your doctor.**

