

CARBOHYDRATES FOR SPORTS



Carbohydrates improve athletic performance by delaying fatigue and allowing an athlete to compete at higher levels for longer. How do you choose the right carb for you?

You may have heard debate over complex vs simple carbohydrates for sporting performance. How do you know what is right for you?

Carbohydrates are a food group made up of chains of sugar molecules that give us the energy to function. Some types of carbohydrates have a simple composition of sugar molecules that makes it easy for digestive enzymes to break down and then be absorbed in the intestines. Other types of carbohydrates have more complex compositions that make it harder to digest and therefore take longer to absorb and utilise energy.

Different types of carbohydrates can be utilised for different sporting scenarios.

Simple carbohydrates like white bread, white rice, sweets, fruits and fruit juice can be digested and absorbed quickly. This is ideal for short-term high-intensity sports like sprints and athletics where stomach discomfort and nausea can be an issue. Athletes require energy but also need their food to be digested in time for their event so that performance is not negatively affected by undigested food.

Complex carbohydrates include wholegrain bread, oats, brown rice, bean, and nuts. Complex carbohydrates take longer to digest and are absorbed over a longer period of time, therefore supplementing blood sugar for sports lasting over an hour.

These sports are often lower intensity which means nausea and stomach discomfort is less of an issue.

For an athlete it depends on the intensity of the sport, preparation facilities, access to certain foods, and personal preferences to determine an ideal pre-game meal. But carbohydrates are an essential factor as the primary energy provider for most sporting scenarios.

