



Nutrition Matters

HEALTHY TRAVEL TIPS AND RESTAURANT RECOMMENDATIONS

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It has happened to all of us at one time or another: waiting too long to stop on a road trip, being stuck traveling with no food and no time or place to stop and even grab something small. So by the time you make it to a restaurant, you are starving and end up making a poor choice or have too much to drink before dinner. It can also happen in everyday life, where we are busy during the day at work and struggle with how to eat when we have to try to squeeze in a workout before dinner and life takes over. Sure, we all try to be smart about our choices, but some of us are better at it than others.

Many athletes struggle with figuring out what snacks they should have on hand, what will help them perform best and how to eat healthy in large groups. Keep in mind that your strategy is unique – no one else will be quite like you. But since fueling is so important for athletes, especially for recovery while traveling or competing, or during periods of heavy training or stress, figuring out a routine that works for you is imperative. During these periods, it can make the difference between feeling fast and unstoppable or feeling one step off.



It can often be difficult to get good foods at the right times while traveling. **Photo: CBMT Creative**

COMMON CHALLENGES AND HEALTHY TRAVEL TIPS

Many of us face similar challenges. In daily life, we hurry from meeting to meeting or to our next obligation (which can include workouts), barely allowing time to eat, let alone cook or go grocery shopping. Traveling also presents the additional challenges of not knowing where your next meal will come from; limited and mostly

unhealthy choices; long, unknown periods of time without food; and group decision making. The best we can do is try to prepare ahead of time and make good choices on the road, but it can help to have specific strategies.

Particularly when traveling, there are sometimes long or unpredictable times between meals, it is hard to always get all the food groups, and food quality is usually poor. In order of importance, eating at the right times is the top priority. Second is getting all the food groups, and third is nutrient quality. You can usually find all the nutrient groups, but the quality and timing may suffer. Just remember that eating as often as needed is the highest priority. These common challenges are explained in more detail below, along with some ideas for travel snacks and eating healthy at restaurants.

Challenge #1: Long Periods without Food or Meals

Tips: Plan meals ahead of time, bring snacks, focus on caloric fluid intake.

Athletes may face this challenge while training and working as well as during travel and competition. We can all try to be prepared with pre-made food, but a lunch box is not always practical or possible. It can be difficult to maintain the recommended frequency of food intake on the road, especially when you are not always in control of the circumstances. Groups are a specific challenge for some of us, so when traveling with a group, it is important to stick with people who have similar routines to yours or people who will make sure your needs are met during a grocery-store run.

A few basic healthy snack ideas are outlined in Table 1, but first it is important to understand the overall goal. For athletes, the goal is to stay fueled – getting enough calories when you need them – so timing is most important, rather than worrying about quality when choices or time is limited. The exception to the rule is if you are trying to lose weight, but you still never want to starve yourself, or you will not feel good or perform well. In general, planning ahead means preparing healthy snacks as well as thinking ahead while on the road. Be prepared to fuel every two to three hours, and always have fluids with you: water and fluids with some calories but no added sugar.

What makes snacks healthy is their ingredient quality, as well as having good protein content. Healthy snacks have more good fat, fewer processed carbs and complete protein combinations. Common complete protein combinations include grain and seeds or nuts (e.g., bread with seeds or pretzels and nuts), beans and grain (e.g., hummus and pita) and some legume and grain combinations (e.g., beans and rice, black beans and flour, refried beans and corn).

Table 1: On-the-Go Snack Ideas

Snack	Typical Version	Healthier Version	Healthiest Version
Chips and Dip	Cheese dip and chips	Chips and salsa	Hummus and pita
Cheese and Crackers	Cheddar and Ritz crackers	Natural cheese and whole-wheat crackers	Organic cheese and all-natural crackers with seeds
Cereal	Cheerios and 2% milk	Bran cereal with whole, organic milk	Granola or grain cereal with almond milk
Nut Mix	Store-bought trail mix	Pre-packaged mix with dried fruit and nuts (no peanuts)	Home-made mix with dried fruit, cashews, shaved almonds and coconut flakes (no peanuts)
Granola and Fruit	Pre-packaged fruit, yogurt and granola parfait	Organic full-fat yogurt, granola, dried fruit	Organic Greek yogurt; nut, seed, and grain granola; fresh fruit
Pre-Packaged Bar	Whey protein bar	Soy and nut protein bar (Clif bar)	Granola bar with dried fruit, naturally sweetened with honey or agave (e.g., Kind bar)

Challenge #2: Lack of All Food Groups

Tips: Prioritize going to a grocery store as soon as possible, choose meals at restaurants that include all the food groups, choose snacks with all food groups represented.

Missing out on food groups is frequently a problem on the road since meals are not always served in proper proportions, and you have to try and make good choices about what to buy and what to order when you're out of your normal routine. This can be solved by being prepared and thinking ahead. Prepare well-thought-out snacks that

are lightweight and sturdy. Pick foods that are fresh but won't go bad within a day or two (e.g., pretzels and nuts, dried fruit). When you arrive at your destination, make it a priority to get to a grocery store as soon as you can. It can sometimes be difficult in large groups, but this is an obvious and useful solution. At restaurants, try to think ahead to the next meal, and order some food to go or take leftovers.

When shopping at a grocery store, convenience and taste are often more of a concern than healthy ingredients, but make sure you plan for all nutrient groups. Complete protein can be the most difficult

since there is rarely pre-cooked meat available, but in these situations, you can make exceptions if needed and choose Italian dry sausage, the least processed pre-cooked meat possible or hard-boiled eggs. Some people can also eat canned tuna and sardines, which are good ways to get seafood on the road. The nut and grain combinations mentioned in Challenge #1 also make complete proteins and can suffice for most protein needs between meals.

Challenge #3: Healthy Options while Traveling and at Restaurants

Tips: Be as prepared as possible, snack and fuel between meals to help yourself make good choices later, choose the healthiest ingredients available as often as possible.

Hint: Use the activities below to practice making healthy choices!

Making healthy choices is often the biggest challenge facing athletes on the road. Always try to be as prepared and thoughtful as possible using the snack ideas and restaurant meal choices in Tables 1 and 2, but you will likely have to make some exceptions to your personal rules to get the calories you need. When faced with choices at restaurants, healthy snacking before

The more you can snack and stay fueled during the day, the easier it is to make healthy decisions when eating out at a restaurant.

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Table 2: Healthy Meal Ideas at Restaurants

Meal	Typical Version	Healthier Version	Healthiest Version
Pasta	Sausage alfredo	Spaghetti with meatballs or chicken alfredo with organic dairy	Seafood and vegetable linguine
Burger	Beef burger with cheese and fries	All-natural, grass-fed beef with kettle-cooked potato chips	Bison or salmon burger with sweet potato fries or hash
Sandwich	Ham and cheese sandwich on white bread with chips	Tuna or chicken salad with organic or olive oil mayo on whole-wheat bread	Oven-roasted turkey or chicken breast with pesto and cranberry sauce on whole-grain bread
Seafood	Fried fish and chips	Seafood bisque or soup	Salmon or whole fish with vegetables and whole-grain bread
Burrito	Fried chimichanga or taco salad with beef and low-fat sour cream	Organic pork or shrimp with vegetables and guacamole	Shredded chicken or seafood burrito with vegetables, guacamole and organic sour cream



Choose meals and snacks that have all the food groups represented.

Photo: CBMT Creative

arriving can help improve your choices when browsing the menu. But sometimes the food being appetizing is more important than nutrient quality. After going long periods without nutrients, just getting calories is a top priority for the body.

At restaurants, start with a healthy appetizer if possible, then make the healthiest choice you can based on the ingredients and meal composition. If you do not eat out very often, enjoy yourself, and do not over-analyze every decision. But if faced with these challenges regularly, the healthy meal versions above can help you make better decisions. The more often you can snack and stay fueled and the more often you choose the healthy versions, the better you will feel and the better you will perform!

ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

Activity #1: Healthy Snacks

Instructions: Write down three snacks you could make out of your fridge if you had to go on a trip tomorrow. Make sure to include some of each nutrient group! A snack = half a meal.

Activity #2: Healthy Meals at Restaurants

Instructions: Choose three menus and pick a healthy meal from each. Jot down any modifications you could make to be healthier.

REFERENCES

- Baechle, T. R., & Earle, R. W. (2008). *Essentials of strength training and conditioning Human kinetics.*
- Hartwig, D., & Hartwig, M. (2012). *It starts with food Victory Belt Pub.*