



Top Food (Real) Alternatives for Training

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Are you sick of that same old sugary sports drink, that goeey sports gel, that bland sports bar? You are not alone. After so many training hours put in each year, it is not uncommon for an athlete to get extremely bored with manufactured sports food. In the past, athletes didn't have such a vast array of sport product to choose from so they resorted to using real food to help refuel during longer training bouts. You can do the same. Get out of your eating rut today and try using the following real foods during your next training bout.

Bananas

There is a good reason why triathlon aid stations are often loaded with tons of bananas. Some health professionals believe the banana is the perfect sport food, loaded with fast release carbohydrate, vitamin B6, which helps fight infection, and potassium, which aids in muscle hydration and recovery from fatigue. Furthermore, as an easily digestible source of fiber, the banana is valuable in preventing the onset of GI distress during training, a symptom that many athletes experience with other fibrous fruits like apples and pears.

For a tasty alternative to a whole banana with a nutrient composition similar to 2 energy bars, spread a mixture of 1 mashed mature banana, 1 Tbsp salted almond butter, and 1 Tbsp dark honey between 2 whole-wheat tortillas. Slice into wedges and place in baggy for easy access during training. The protein within the almond butter may help prevent premature depletion of muscle glycogen while the sodium will help prevent muscle cramping. Almond butter is also rich in vitamin E, an antioxidant that may help delay muscular fatigue and enhance recovery by reducing exercise-induced oxidative injury. Another bonus within this whole food concoction is the honey, which has been shown to significantly boost average power and endurance, perhaps due to its blend of sugars, B-vitamins and amino acids.

Watermelon

As the name of the fruit implies, watermelon is over 90% water, making it a very hydrating fruit. Furthermore, watermelon is rich in fast release carbohydrate, which will help prevent that mental "bonk" and premature muscle fatigue during training. While lacking in sodium, watermelon is a good source of potassium, a nutrient essential for optimal muscle function. A little known fact about watermelon is that it is rich in a potent antioxidant called lycopene which may help reduce cellular damage, lowering risk for certain types of cancer and enhancing immune function during intense

training. Try juicing a watermelon for an alternative, yet extremely tasty, sports drink. Remember that an electrolyte tablet may be a necessary addition for salty sweaters since watermelon is essentially void of sodium.

Hot Cocoa

On a brisk morning, what better way to warm your core body temperature as well as replace fluid with hot cocoa. Plus, who doesn't love that chocolate flavor? Recent research conducted at Cornell University in New York has found that hot cocoa provides quite the nutritional punch, containing more than double the amount of antioxidant chemicals (phenols and flavanoids) than found in red wine and green tea. According to researcher Chang Yong Lee, Ph.D., these antioxidant chemicals may reduce cell damage that results from strenuous exercise. In a thermo, mix 2 Tbsp of cocoa powder and 1 Tbsp table sugar with 8 ounces hot water to pack in 18 grams of glycogen replenishing carbohydrate. While cocoa does provide plenty of potassium for muscle hydration, it lacks sodium, which makes salt supplementation essential.

Baked & Salted Potato Wedges

Potatoes provide a nutritional profile that is perfect for the endurance athlete. With 34 grams of energy enhancing carbohydrate per 4 ounces, sweet potatoes provide over 100% of our daily needs for beta carotene, and more than a quarter of our daily needs for vitamins C and E, nutrients which have been shown to potentially help protect cell damage in athletes competing in extreme environments (e.g., altitude, heat, cold, pollution) as well as enhance muscle recovery after intense running efforts. White potatoes are also rich in fast release carbohydrate and provide an ample supply of potassium and metabolic enhancing B-vitamins. To make potato wedges: 1) Place two scrubbed and sliced sweet and white potatoes into a baggy with 1 tsp oil and 1/8 tsp salt. Shake, 2) Place potatoes on pan coated with cooking spray. 3) Bake at 475 degrees for 30 minutes (turning potatoes every 10 minutes), 4) Let cool, and 5) Place in a baggy for a nourishing treat while training. The nutrient content of this recipe is actually equivalent to two energy gels, yet has a superior antioxidant and electrolyte profile.

Pierogies

A Polish pasta dumpling filled with mashed potatoes and cheese, pierogies supply 32 grams of fast release carbohydrates, 9 grams of energy sustaining protein, only 6 grams of fat and over 500 mg of sodium per 3 items. They are very easy to boil and throw in a baggy when you are hurried and looking for something to help maintain energy levels during a long bike ride.

Table 1. Nutrient Content of Top Real Training Foods

Food	Calories	Carbohydrate (grams)	Protein (grams)	Fat (grams)	Sodium (mg)	Other Noteworthy Nutrients
Bananas, 1 medium	105	27	1.2	0	1	Potassium Vitamins B6, C
Banana/Honey/	390	72	8	10	434	Potassium

Almond Butter Quesadilla, 1 item						Calcium Magnesium Vitamin E
Watermelon, 2 cup cubes	102	24	2	0	6	Vitamin C Lycopene Fluid
Hot Cocoa (with sugar), 1 cup	86	18	2	1	0	Potassium Phenols Flavonoids
Baked & Salted Potato Wedges, total of 2 potatoes	302	60	5	5	343	Potassium Beta Carotene Vitamins C, E Magnesium
Potato & Cheese Pierogie, 3 items	190	35	6	2	540	Calcium

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