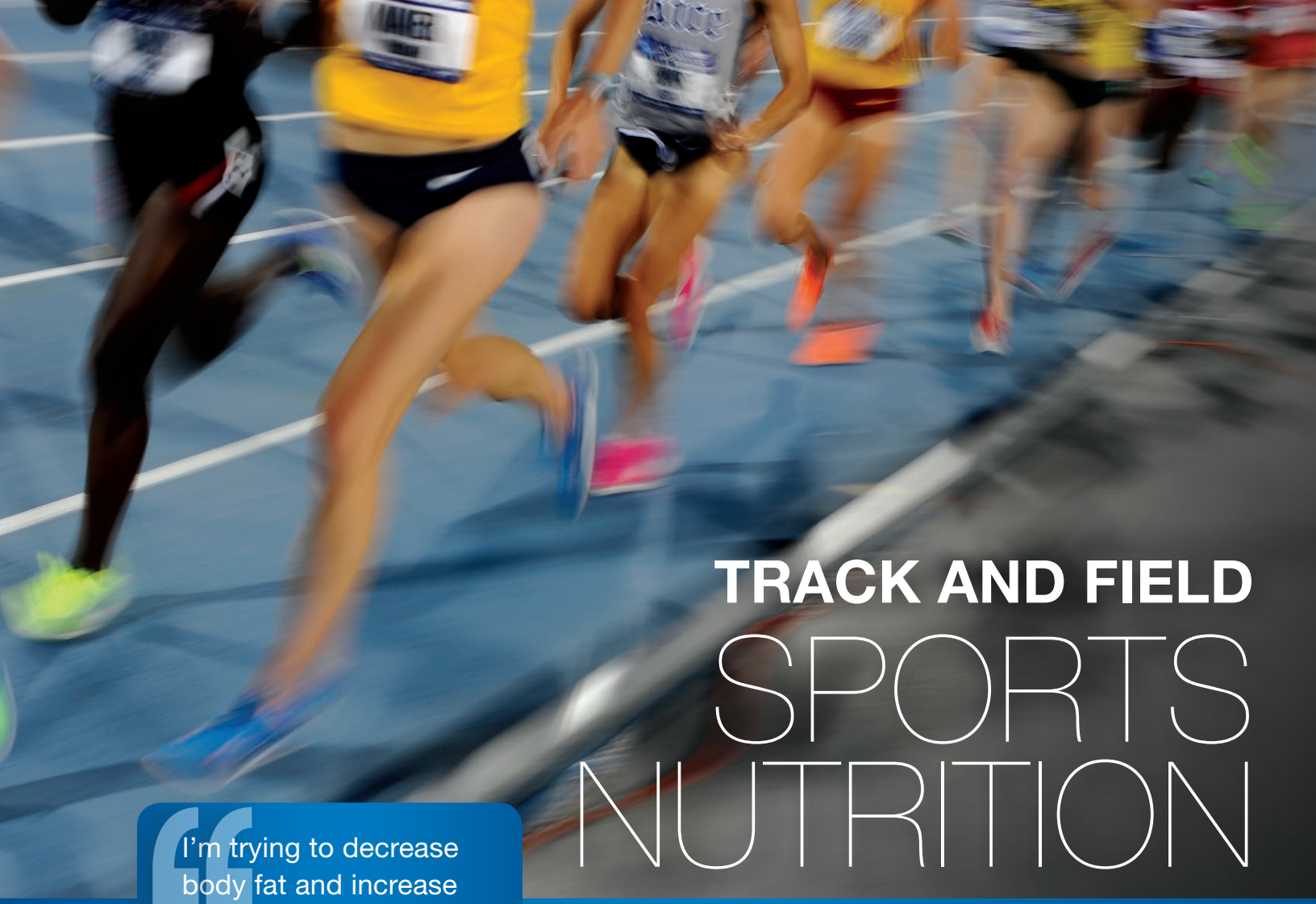

TRACK AND FIELD SPORTS NUTRITION

PHOTOS FROM NCAA PHOTOS ARCHIVE AND SHUTTERSTOCK

> I'm trying to decrease body fat and increase lean muscle, so I skip breakfast, eat some fruit for lunch and have a large dinner at night. I'm having a tough time making it through my preseason training sessions, and I'm not achieving my body composition goals. How should I be eating during this intense training phase?

Track and field is a unique sport that combines various athletic events based on the physical skill sets of running, jumping and throwing. The speed, power, strength and endurance needed by all track and field athletes are acquired through hours of effective training as well as sound nutrition strategies. Consistent and adequate sports nutrition habits enable athletes to build and maintain strength, keep their bodies properly fueled and hydrated, and allow their bodies to recover efficiently throughout the entire indoor, outdoor and training seasons.

To ensure success, athletes require distinct training regimens for a specific event in addition to appropriate nutrition to fuel their mind and body in the classroom and on the track.

Information presented by

NCAA SPORT SCIENCE INSTITUTE

Sports, Cardiovascular, and Wellness Nutrition
a dietetic practice group of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
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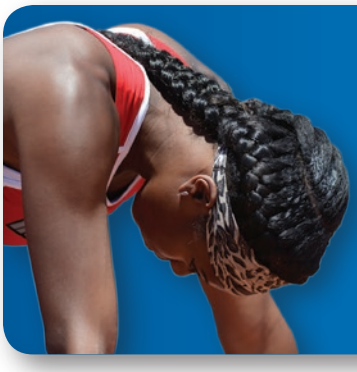

PHASES OF TRAINING

Collegiate track and field athletes train at different intensities and stages throughout the year according to their specific event and individual needs. While these differences exist, the year for all track and field student-athletes can be broken into three major phases: preseason, competition/championship and offseason.

PRESEASON:

Preseason training is the time of year when the most strenuous and vigorous workouts occur. Whatever the training entails, proper fueling and hydration strategies are key for daily improvement and optimal performance.

- **Daily meals and snacks.** A common trend seen with track and field athletes is the tendency to skip breakfast, skimp on lunch and snacks, and backload their calories at the end of the day, usually after practice. Fueling the body frequently and consistently throughout each day ensures that you receive adequate amounts of carbohydrate for energy purposes, proper protein intake for repairing and building muscle tissue, and healthy portions of fat for enhancing endurance and healing potential.

  Preseason is the perfect time to plan and experiment with different types of food and the timing of meals and snacks in order to figure out what works best. Planning meals and snacks ahead of time will prevent settling on quick, last-minute, poor food choices. It will also assist you with meeting weight management and body composition goals, and allow you to transition into the competition season with ease.

- **Preseason nutrition routine.** Even though track and field athletes differ in size, physique and event, a consistent nutrition routine is essential for everyone. Calorie, carbohydrate and protein needs are highest during the preseason phase due to the high intensity and longer duration of training sessions. Base portion sizes on your individual needs and goals.

  - The day should always begin with a wholesome breakfast consisting of a variety of nutrient-dense foods. If you're not accustomed to eating in the morning, starting simple and small can help your body adjust to eating early and help make breakfast a daily habit. A few examples include:
    - apple slices dipped in peanut butter
    - half of a bagel topped with peanut butter and honey
    - a small tortilla rolled with sliced turkey meat and spinach
    - ½ cup trail mix: mixed nuts, dried fruit, cereal and pretzels
  - Track and field athletes' muscles are always hungry for fuel before and after practice. Two to three hours after breakfast, follow up with a small nutritious snack. Plan your snacks ahead of time and include foods that can be packed in a school bag or lunch box for easy transport.
  - When fueling for an afternoon practice, the lunch meal enables you to top off your body's glycogen stores and provide optimal energy for a strong and successful training session.
  - Midpractice fuel may be needed for sessions lasting longer than an hour or for those that take place in hot and humid conditions. In addition to drinking fluids during practice, you can incorporate carbohydrate boosters like energy gels or chews; fruit such as bananas, orange slices and grapes; applesauce pouches; and granola bars.
  - Practice may end with a cool down and stretching, but practice is not completely finished until a recovery snack or meal is consumed. The ultimate goal of post-practice refueling is to fully prepare the body for the next day's practice or event. Recovery nutrition can be as easy as a three-step process. *(See inset box.)*
  - Ending the busy day with a wholesome dinner helps continue the recovery process and ensures that calories and nutrient needs are met. Include a variety of whole-grain carbohydrates, lean protein, vegetables and heart-healthy fats. Meal prepping at the beginning of the week can ultimately save time and money.

THREE-STEP RECOVERY NUTRITION

Within 30 minutes post-workout:

1. Reload your body's energy reserves with at least 50 grams of carbohydrate.
2. Repair and rebuild stressed muscle tissue with at least 15 grams of protein.
3. Rehydrate with at least 20 ounces of water and/or electrolyte beverage.

- **Hydration.** Establishing hydration and rehydration strategies are crucial for the prevention of risks associated with dehydration.
  - Drink at least 16 ounces of water and/or fluid (milk, 100 percent fruit juice, smoothies, etc.) first thing in the morning.
  - Carry a large water jug to hydrate throughout the day, especially the couple of hours leading up to practice.
  - Consume foods high in water content and electrolytes (especially if prone to cramping): milk, yogurt, bananas, potatoes, dried fruit and nuts trail mix, deli meat, beef jerky, etc.
  - Drink about 6 ounces of fluid every 15 to 20 minutes during practice. Water is adequate for practices shorter than one hour. Add in an electrolyte beverage for practices lasting longer than one hour or if training in hot and humid conditions.
  - Monitor fluid losses. Drink 20 to 24 ounces of water and/or electrolyte beverage for every pound lost during practice.

COMPETITION/CHAMPIONSHIP PHASE:

The entire fall semester is dedicated to preparing track and field athletes both physically and mentally for the long indoor and outdoor seasons ahead. When the season begins in January, home and travel meets are pretty much nonstop until mid-June; this leaves little to no time to figure out which nutrition and hydration plan works best. Therefore, it is important to develop your nutrition strategy during the preseason so that it can be carried over into the competition phase.

- **Modify portions.** Track and field athletes continue to train during the competition season, but typically the intensity and duration are significantly decreased. In turn, athletes should modify their portions according to their energy expenditure. For example, when tapering workouts in preparation for a big meet, athletes should slightly decrease portions of carbohydrate-based foods and increase lean protein and vegetable choices. Variety and balance are keys for the competition season. Entire food groups should never be eliminated because each plays a vital role in energy production and recovery.
- **Frequent travel.** Constant travel may sometimes present issues with choosing nutritious foods, but with some planning and preparation, it is possible to stay on track with a healthy nutrition regimen. *(See the **Eating on the Road** fact sheet.)*

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- **Pre-meet meal.** The purpose of the pre-meet meal is to top off carbohydrate stores in the body for optimum energy and mental focus and to ensure the athlete is in a completely hydrated state going into competition. Even though the pre-meet meal plays a significant role in performance, it is important to understand that one nutritious pre-meet meal does not make up for poor nutrition habits throughout the week. Since every track and field athlete is unique, the timing and type of pre-meet meal may vary, but some common rules of thumb can assist all track and field athletes in optimizing their energy and performance potential:
  - Eat a small snack or meal one to two hours before the event, or eat a larger snack or meal three to four hours before the event.
  - Focus on high-carbohydrate foods and drinks, moderate amounts of lean protein, and small amounts of foods with fat and fiber.
  - Stick with simple and familiar foods that you consumed during the preseason. Do not try anything new on meet day.
  - Continue to hydrate normally with water and/or electrolyte beverages.

STAYING ON TRACK WHILE ON THE ROAD

- Plan and pack healthy snacks for long bus trips and flights: dried fruit and nut trail mix, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, tuna fish pouches, whole fruit, granola bars, bottled water.
- During bus stops or layovers, choose an eatery that offers grilled/lean meats, salads, wholesome carbohydrates, and vegetables.
- Before departing, research restaurants close to the hotel and plan which meals you will order during your stay.

OFFSEASON:

Once the track and field season comes to an end, athletes take advantage of some time off for rest and recovery before summer training. This period of time presents the perfect opportunity to focus on modifying your nutritional habits, practicing meal preparation and learning how to cook new recipes. In addition, the offseason is when athletes can concentrate on altering body weight and composition according to individual goals.

Offseason training may vary, but it usually tends to be less intense and shorter in duration. When training decreases, energy expenditure correspondingly decreases; therefore, it's important to modify portions and food choices to prevent unwanted weight gain. The focus should be more on lean sources of protein and vegetables and less on carbohydrate-based foods.