



WORKOUT FOOD

Read on to know how to manage your meals before and after exercise

■ DINSACHAN

HAVE YOU been sweating it out on the treadmill, eating low-carb meals and yet, still sulking at not losing a kilo or an inch? Chances are you haven't been managing the meals before and after your workout properly. You've probably fallen prey to the several myths that surround what you should or shouldn't eat before and after a session at the gym. We bust some popular myths and set the record straight on workout nutrition.

MYTH: Work out on an empty stomach to lose weight.
FACT: You should never exercise on an empty stomach. "You can't exercise on a full stomach either. But it's essential if you're trying to lose weight," says Kajal Pandya, senior dietician, Sitaram Bhartia Institute of Science and Research, New Delhi. You need energy to be able to exercise. So, before you hit the gym, snack on carbs that break down quickly like corn flakes, dalia and seasonal fruits for your dose of energy.

Eat at least 30 minutes before exercise so that the food has time to get digested by the time you start and release the required energy for the workout. Say no to high-protein foods like nuts, high-fat and sugary foods because they take longer to digest. Moreover, fatty foods will give you extra calories.

MYTH: Eating after workout negates its effect.
FACT: It doesn't, if you do it right. Your need to refuel your body fast to compensate for the immense energy loss it incurs during workout. Lemonade, fruit juices and water will help you replace the sodium and other electrolytes you lose during exercise.

And you must eat too. "Ideally, you should have your full meal one-and-a-half hours after a 45-60-minute exercise session. But that's impractical as most people rush to office after their morning workouts. They could take a light bite after 30-40 minutes," says Jyoti Arora, lead dietician, Artemis Health Institute, Gurgaon. It should not be something too heavy or too high in fat. Best options include multi-grain bread, soya bread, wheat bran, whole pulses, and brown rice.

MYTH: Sports drinks help you recover after exercise.
FACT: Studies at University of Massachusetts, Amherst suggest that sports drinks or energy bars can negate the effects of exercise. "Sports drinks are good only if you are an athlete and exercise or train rigorously for several hours at a stretch," says Arora. Water is enough for most people. "If you really have to take them, consult your doctor or instructor as they have side effects," warns Pandya. ♦

FOR THE REST OF THE DAY

Meals around workouts focus on carbs and proteins. The rest of your meals should supply you with other important nutrients such as vitamins and minerals. Make sure you have enough fresh fruits and veggies. Also, don't go without food for more than four hours.

"Eat five to six small meals throughout the day rather than two to three heavy meals as that gives sustained energy release" says Cheenu Prashar, consultant dietician, Max Healthcare, New Delhi.

Keep yourself well hydrated. Carry a bottle of water with you all day to drink between meals.