

Nutrition Considerations for Travel

Athletes commonly travel for competitions, and traveling across multiple time zones, to different countries, or to different environmental conditions can all have an impact on athlete nutrition. Consider the following general nutrition rules:

- Bring snacks, sports bars, and sports beverage packets (to be diluted in bottled water) that are known to be well tolerated.
- To avoid excess fat intake, ordering grilled, baked, boiled, and broiled foods are better than fried, deep-fried, or sautéed foods.
- If possible, athletes should order à la carte to have the food exactly as they want it.
- If traveling by air, athletes should give the airlines fair warning of special dietary requirements (gluten free, vegetarian, etc.) a minimum of 24 hours in advance.
- Vegetarian offerings are often lower in fat and higher in carbohydrate than regularly served foods, so these may be a good option for plane travel even if not following a vegetarian diet.
- Air travel is dehydrating, so athletes should bring water or a sports beverage on the plane.
- Athletes changing time zones should make every attempt to get on the local schedule as soon as possible. In general, it takes 1 day for circadian rhythms to adjust for each time zone change (i.e., crossing five time zones takes approximately 5 days to adjust to). Jet lag is associated with loss of sleep, loss of appetite, fatigue, loss of leg strength, loss of power, and reduced speed, so arriving at the destination early enough to adapt is important for optimizing performance.
- Safety and hygiene standards vary worldwide, so athletes traveling to other countries may be at increased risk of developing diarrhea with associated dehydration if not careful about what foods are consumed. Ideally the athlete should learn about any possible food safety risks in advance. Wherever the athlete travels, it is generally a good idea to avoid raw or undercooked foods.
- Athletes with food sensitivities, allergies, or intolerances should create 3 × 5 cards in the language of the destination country. This is easily done using web-based translation systems. When going to a restaurant, the card should be handed to the server to assure they fully understand the dietary restrictions.
- Gradually shift the time of sleep by mimicking the light exposure at the destination's time zone several days before traveling.
- Short naps of 20 to 30 minutes may help athletes recover from the typical sleep deprivation that occurs with travel.
- Have snacks readily available and drink plenty of nonalcoholic fluids (preferably bottled).
- Try to get on the local schedule as soon as possible following arrival, including eating meals at regular times.