



Foundations of Coaching 101

Count on Carbohydrates for the Young Swimmer by Jill Castle, MS, RD

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The truth is, carbohydrates supply important nutrients and a critical energy source for the young swimmer. Carbohydrates are categorized as simple (sugar) or complex (starch and fiber). Foods such as grains, fruit, vegetables and dairy products are complex carbohydrates and desirable for the athlete. Why? The more complex the source, the longer it takes to digest and absorb, making glucose available to the muscles over a longer period. On the other hand, simple carbohydrate sources are quickly digested and absorbed, releasing glucose almost immediately to the body. Both sources are beneficial to the young swimmer.

Generally, children's diets are rich in carbohydrate, but the balance of complex and simple sources are skewed. Many kids are getting more carbohydrate from simple sources than they need, overdosing on soda, other sweetened beverages, desserts, candy and other processed snack foods. These foods may negatively impact the nutrition 'bottom line' for growing swimmers, resulting in excess calories and nutrient gaps in their diet. Scaling back on these foods leaves room for the important (and more nutritious) complex carbohydrate foods.

So how can young swimmers bank on getting enough and the right type of carbohydrates? Tilt the balance in favor of complex carbohydrates with these tips:

- Eat an array of fruit and vegetables, targeting 5 servings (1 cup) each day.
- Incorporate starchy (potato and other root vegetables) and non-starchy vegetables into meals and snacks.
- Eat whole grains (cereal, bread, pasta, rice, crackers) over refined grains, at least half of the time.
- Drink and eat low-fat dairy products (or dairy substitutes), targeting 3 cups each day.
- Scale back on desserts, candy, processed snacks, soda and other sweetened beverages—keep it to one or two servings (or less) each day.
- Strategically use sports drinks during training and competition, not as an accompaniment to a meal or snack.