

Travelling abroad

Introduction

For most athletes, travelling abroad for training and / or competition is a regular occurrence. The availability and cost of food and drink whilst in transit and at the country of destination can be a major determinant of whether an athlete meets his or her nutritional need. Other issues such as the standard of food hygiene, type of accommodation and catering facilities at the training / competition venue are also important factors to consider. To maximise performance, planning how you will meet your nutritional requirements while you are away from home is vital and can contribute to a successful trip. Going through the following checklist as far in advance as possible may help:

Preparing for your journey

- Check your vaccinations are up to date. This needs to be planned at least 3 months before your date of travel.
- Visit the dentist regularly. A toothache is the last thing you need on competition day!
- Check the weather conditions of your destination (see www.worldweather.org/) and pack accordingly.
 - If travelling to an area of high pollution, maximise your intake of foods rich in antioxidant nutrients.
 - If exercising at altitude, your carbohydrate needs will be higher than normal and you will need individual advice from a sports dietitian.
- You will be at higher risk of developing food poisoning in certain countries, particularly if the level of food hygiene is lower than in the UK. Research the country before you go by asking people who have travelled there recently, ask them for reputable places to eat and look at the information on websites such as:

www.travel.roughguides.com/

www.lonelyplanet.com/

www.timeout.com/

www.frommers.com/

- If you have special dietary needs, let the airline know in advance to ensure that the food provided is suitable. Ask for extra portions of carbohydrate foods such as bread, rice, pasta etc and request lower fat meals. Enquire what time meals will be served and take extra carbohydrate foods with you in case of delays.
- Ask support staff to find out what meals will be available at the accommodation

This information is taken from 'Fuel for Performance, Nutrition for Sport', a sports nutrition resource updated and revised by the following Welsh sports dietitians:

Rhian Owen, Chris Cashin, Elaine Hibbert-Jones and Gill Regan.

Every acknowledgement is given to all the sports dietitians who contributed to the original publication of this resource, which was first published in 1998.

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Useful things to take

Low fat powdered milk	Milk shake powder
Coffee whitener	Dried fruit
Low fat breakfast / cereal bars	Instant noodles and rice
Low fat meal replacement powders	Tea, coffee, instant hot drinks
Porridge or other breakfast cereal	Powdered sports drinks / gels
Electrolyte replacement powder sachets	Sugar free chewing gum
Travel adaptor	Measuring jug,
Utensils (measuring spoon, whisk)	Travel kettle
Can opener	Portable water steriliser

Remember to check with customs prior to departure to ensure that any food, drinks and nutritional supplements you normally use are allowed in the country you are travelling to. Ensure all food taken is sealed on entry to the country and remember to declare any uneaten food at your destination airport

Before you travel

- Check the size and weight of your baggage allowance with the airline. Check the maximum size limit for carry-on luggage for your airline. Most airlines usually have a drop-box which allows you check whether your baggage is less than the maximum size allowed. The weight limit will also vary so check with the airline.
- Don't overfill your bag and never pack any sharp objects in your hand luggage. There are also restrictions on the quantity of liquids e.g. water, other drinks and gels that are allowed through airport security check points. For up to date information on restrictions and advice on what you can and cannot take in your hand luggage, visit www.dft.gov.uk or contact the relevant airport / airline.

The journey

- Avoid drinking alcohol whilst travelling and keep tea, coffee and cola drinks to a minimum as these may increase the risk of dehydration. Drink water, a hypotonic or isotonic sports drink (see section on fluids for examples), diluted fruit juice or squash instead.
- If you are not passing as much urine as normal, it is likely you need to drink more fluid.

Symptoms such as nausea, dizziness, headache and lack of co-ordination are all signs that you may not be drinking enough. If you are thirsty, you are already dehydrated. Dehydration will have a detrimental affect on your performance.

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Jetlag

- Jetlag may affect your appetite and can increase the risk of constipation. Eat and drink regularly and ensure you carry suitable snacks and drinks with you at all times.
- Adjust your eating habits as soon as possible to fit in to the local time.

Eating and drinking

- On arrival at your destination, check your weight regularly. If you are losing weight, this could be a sign you are not eating enough or becoming dehydrated.
- If you are in a hot and / or humid country, take special care to monitor your hydration status (see section on 'monitoring your hydration status') and drink accordingly. This is particularly important
 - during the first few days of arriving when your body is adapting to the heat
 - if you become ill with a fever, sickness or diarrhoea.

Avoiding illness

- The hours of training can be wasted in an instant if an athlete becomes ill. Below are some general tips which will help reduce the risk of becoming ill.
 - Take your own water bottle, label it with your details. Never share bottles, utensils and other equipment as this will increase the risk of infection being spread.
 - Sterilising tablets are useful for cleaning bottles whilst away and alcohol gel can be used to keep hands clean.
 - Drink bottled water (check that the seal is intact).
 - Boiling water for at least 10 minutes or using a water purifier to filter the water are both more effective than sterilisation tablets. Portable UV water purifier/sterilisers e.g. Steripen[®] are also effective but are expensive to buy.
 - Avoid ice in drinks and brush your teeth with bottled or sterilised water.
 - Avoid salad. Lettuce plants are known to absorb bacteria such as E.Coli and Salmonella through their roots and once within the plant, these bacteria cannot be removed by washing.
 - Avoid eating foods from local open air markets or street stalls.
 - Avoid seafood as it may have come from contaminated water.
 - Ensure food is cooked thoroughly and ensure milk has been pasteurised.
 - Avoid eating from buffets that look like the food has been there for a while.
 - Ensure that all utensils / crockery are clean. In particular, if used, ensure chopsticks have not been used by anyone else beforehand.

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