

Eat to Compete

Nutrition on the road

Karen Armstrong RD

Athletes spend a lot of time traveling – to school, to practice, to training camps and competitions. Long distance travel can have a significant effect on your performance unless you've given some thought to nutrition on the road (or in the air).

When you're travelling more than one to two hours by bus or plane, bring food with you. This way you have control over your food choices and the timing of your meals and snacks. Don't assume you'll be able to find something appropriate when the bus stops. Remember most airlines don't serve meals and the snacks are usually quite small. Try to maintain the same meal and snack schedule that you've been following during training. Bring extra snacks in case of delays.

Packing food for travel needs some thought. It needs to be accessible, not stashed under the bus or in the cargo area of the plane. If you're bringing perishable items like sandwiches made with meat, fish, cheese or eggs, make sure you have an ice pack or some frozen juice boxes to keep everything cold.

If you're travelling across an international border, find out before you travel if there are restrictions on bringing food across the border. For example, the USA does not allow fresh fruits and vegetables but fruit roll-ups and juices are ok.

Dehydration can be a major problem when you travel. The air in buses and planes can be very dry and sometimes people limit fluid intake to avoid having to use the facilities. Take a water bottle or two with you – it's far more economical than buying bottled water. If you're travelling by bus, you can fill the bottles at home. If you're flying, take empty bottles through security and fill them with water before you board the plane. Sip frequently and aim to drink about 1 cup (250ml) for every hour of travel.

Travel food ideas:

Unsweetened juice

Dried cereal or granola

Whole wheat breads, bagels, crackers

Trail mix

Fresh fruits, veggie sticks

Peanut butter

Puddings or fruit cups (remember a spoon)

Meat, cheese, fish or egg sandwiches (keep these cold)

Yogurt, milk, cheese (keep these cold)

Sports bars (eg Cliff bars, PowerBars)

Karen Armstrong is a Registered Dietitian with Manitoba Chicken Producers (www.chicken.mb.ca). She's an age group triathlete, masters swimmer, recreational skijorer and member of the board of Swim Manitoba. Look for more tips and information on eating to compete in upcoming issues of Coaches Clipboard. Karen can be reached at karmstrong@chicken.mb.ca.