



NUTRITION Q & A

What are some foods you consistently see triathletes eating that they should avoid?

A: I love this question! Here are three of my top “skip ‘em” foods:

- 1. Reduced fat peanut butter.** At a quick glance it sounds promising, but look further and you’ll find that reduced fat versions of this favorite food will only save you 10–20 calories per 2 tablespoon serving, and will cost you in terms of more carbs, more total grams of added sugars and an ingredient list that starts with corn syrup solids and sugar, rather than peanuts!
- 2. Baked chips.** Again, first pass looks good with a reduction from 160 calories per 1-ounce serving to 120

calories, and from 10 grams to 2 grams of total fat. But these chips come with added sugars, and the reduction in total fat also means that these chips are not very filling. My triathlete clients know that potato chips are not healthy, so can usually stick to a serving, but switch to baked chips and portion control goes out the window. Instead, try a single serving of tortilla chips, which have 140 calories, a more modest 7 grams of fat, no added sugar and only three ingredients.

- 3. Traditional cooking sprays.** Although the labels claim these products are “fat free,” that’s only

because they have chosen to define the serving size as a third-of-a-second spray. A one-second spray would set you back only 7.5 calories and 0.8–0.9 grams of saturated fat, but I know that those who use cooking sprays generally use way more than this amount. Spraying for 5 seconds equals 37.5 calories and 4.5 grams of fat! Instead, stick to 1–2 teaspoons of olive or avocado oil, or even real butter, and feel good about it.

Q: How do I avoid gaining a ton of weight in the off-season as in years past? I’d like to stay within 5 pounds of my racing weight.

A: You are already on your way to less off-season weight gain this year, as intent is the first step. I recommend that athletes set a weight range, and check every one to two weeks during the off-season, to avoid exactly what you describe—a larger than desired winter weight gain.

Step two is to honestly assess your training reduction. Many athletes take a few weeks completely off at this time of year, so their caloric expenditure from exercise is reduced from eight (or 12, or 16) hours per week to zero. Other triathletes use this time to cross-train, ski or try something new, but are still generally burning substantially fewer calories than during the season.

Either way, you need fewer total calories and carbs (along with slightly less total protein and total fat). Start by decreasing your snacks, which likely increased in size and energy throughout the

season. Focus on including a serving of fruit or vegetables with each snack and two or more servings with each meal. Doing so will help you decrease your total calorie intake, keep your fiber intake high, and boost your intake of important immunity-boosting vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals, which will help your body fight off winters colds and flus. Additionally, avoid the temptation to indulge in everything you’ve denied yourself in season. You can indulge in nutritional treats, but not with the mentality “the sky’s the limit.” (And of course I never recommend denying yourself your favorite nutritional treats during the season either—all things in moderation keep us happy and prevent off-season binging.)

Since I know many triathletes like numbers and specifics, you may want to look for a board-certified sports dietitian, coach or exercise physiologist in your area who offers resting metabolic rate testing. This test, which measures what is called respiratory exchange, takes about 10 minutes, and will tell you your individual metabolic rate at a certain point in time. This will accurately measure the number of calories your body requires (or burns) at rest, and will give a caloric intake range to aim for in the off-season.

—LAUREN ANTONUCCI

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If you'd like to have your nutrition questions answered on this page, send an email to fuel@competitorgroup.com.