

## **Nutrition Tips and Tricks**

Gymnastics is a high intensity, dynamic sport that requires speed, strength, co-ordination, balance, flexibility, and grace. Nutritional requirements for athletes will vary depending on a range of factors.



Here at Tri Star, we are growing our understanding of how good nutrition is key to young athlete's growth, health and wellbeing, along with performance, recovery and injury prevention.

Nutrition, wellbeing, and body image were highlighted in GNZ's 2021 review as areas requiring attention in gymnastics across Aotearoa. We are committed to supporting and providing athletes and our community with up-to-date evidence-based nutritional information, within a body positive environment – we recognize the inherent value and mana of each person.

Below we have put together some general meal ideas as well as some specific training nutrition recommendations. These recommendations have been taken from the Sports Dieticians Australia website, which is linked that the end.

### **General Meal Ideas:**

It can sometimes be difficult thinking of what to prepare and eat, so we have put together some general meal ideas to get you started.

#### Breakfast ideas

- Bircher Muesli
- Vegetable and ham frittata
- Porridge with nuts, peanut butter and banana
- Eggs on toast with avocado and spinach
- Wholegrain cereal with Greek yoghurt and fruit

#### Lunch ideas

- Pasta salad with veg, chicken or tuna
- Sushi
- Baked kumera with baked beans and green salad
- Vegetable soup with cheese toastie on wholegrain bread

#### Dinner ideas

- Chicken stirfry with noodles and green vegetables
- Vegetable Thai green curry
- Chicken quinoa salad
- Grilled lean red meat with roast vegetables
- Spaghetti Bolognese (add grated carrot or zucchini into the sauce for extra veg)
- Grilled white fish or salmon, kumera and asparagus

### **Training nutrition**

Nutrition is incredibly important for growing gymnasts to aid in energy requirements, recovery, and injury prevention.

The main food groups can be broken down into 3 categories- Carbohydrate, protein, and fat.

- Carbohydrates: provide energy to muscles and the brain, making up at least 50% of a gymnast's diet. Specific examples of carbohydrates include quinoa, kumara, whole grain bread, beans, corn, wheat, oats, fruit.

- Protein: helps to aid in muscle repair and recovery and should be included at all main meals and snacks. Specific examples include lean red meat, chicken, fish, eggs, pork, dairy, soy, lentils, nuts.
- Fat: gives your body energy and supports cell function. Specific examples include avocado, nuts, seeds, olive oil, salmon.

Gymnasts, especially younger athletes, may prefer small frequent meals to fit around studies and long hours of training. Ideas for nutrient-rich snacks that can be eaten in the car or on the bus between school and training include:

- Yoghurt & fruit
- Fruit toast or homemade fruit muffins
- Milk (e.g., dairy or plant based up and go)
- Sandwiches with nutritious fillings
- Wholegrain crackers with cheese or tuna
- Plain popcorn
- One square meal bar

### **Fluid needs**

It is important that gymnasts have adequate hydration for their performance, concentration, endurance, and recovery. We recommend that athletes drink water during training. Additionally, it is recommended that gymnasts drink 2-3 cups of milk per day for bone health.

### **Eating before competition**

Gymnasts need to choose foods and drinks that are easily digestible before competition.

A light meal or substantial snack about 1-2 hours before warm-up will help to top up energy stores before competition. Food choices should be mostly carbohydrate to avoid gut discomfort. Some examples of pre-competition snacks could include:

- Fresh fruit + small tub of yoghurt
- Breakfast cereal with milk and/or yoghurt
- Toast with peanut butter or banana
- Small serve of pasta or rice and tuna
- Whole grain wraps or sandwich with light fillings

### **Eating and drinking during competition**

Competition times often overlap one to two main meals. In these circumstances, extra food between routines is essential for sustaining energy levels and concentration. During training and competition- we don't encourage the use of lollies during comps or trainings. Save them as a treat for after comps. Below are some ideas for snacks that can be eaten during competitions.

- Trail mix
- Bananas
- One square meal bar
- Up and Go
- Yoghurt, light sandwiches, trail mix and fruit are all ideal snack options for between routines to maintain energy levels and mental stamina.

## Recovery

There are three golden rules in recovery nutrition:

- Refuel
- Repair
- Rehydrate

Gymnasts need to ensure that a recovery meal or snack is eaten soon after competitions and trainings to help optimise the above processes. Paring two or three food groups (Carbohydrate, protein, and fat) can aid in energy and staying power. Examples of good recovery meal options include:

- Yoghurt with nuts
- Crackers with cheese or nut butter
- Carrots with hummus
- Chicken and salad sandwich or wrap
- Homemade pita bread pizzas with veggie or lean meat toppings
- Beef and veggie stir-fry with rice or noodles.

## Additional Considerations

- Be organised: If travelling straight from school to training, pack snacks and water bottles to have before, during and after training. Tristar has begun selling ‘snack packs’ for your convenience. These include nuts and dried fruits, rice crackers, up and go, fruit sticks, or fruit packs.
- It is worth investing in a good thermos or Tupperware as sometimes gymnasts won’t return home until late in the evening. Some car friendly meal ideas include quiche or frittata, filled wraps, pasta.
- Disordered eating: can be an issue with some gymnasts. Care should be taken to encourage a wide range of foods so they can enjoy all without guilt, shame, or anxiety. If you have any concerns about your child eating habits, please reach out to your Wellbeing Coordinator.
- Development: Make sure your child’s body is growing and developing, because if these two things aren’t happening, it may mean that they don’t have enough energy to repair and recover from training. This can lead to injury or longer-term health concerns.

This information has been sourced from Australian and American nutritionists- please refer to the reference links below. We have also included links to Kiwi’s Nikki Hart and Dane Baker’s websites. Please note that this information is intended as general advice only and may not suit individual circumstances – please see your GP or registered dietician for specific support.



### **Useful Links:**

Nikki Hart- Nutritionist

<http://nikkihartnutrition.co.nz/>

Dane Baker- Performance Dietitian

<https://www.axissportsmedicine.co.nz/services/nutrition-clinic>

### **References:**

**Christina Anderson- the Gymnasts Nutritionist:**

<https://christinaandersonrdn.com/nutrition-for-gymnasts/>

**USA Gymnastics:**

<https://usagym.org/pages/aboutus/wellness/>

**Sports Dietitian Australia:**

<https://www.sportsdietitians.com.au/factsheets/food-for-your-sport/food-for-your-sport-gymnastics/>