

# Nutrition for Water Polo, Part 1

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## The Sport

Water polo is a high-intensity, intermittent activity that requires aspects of both strength and endurance over four, seven-minute periods. Although water polo is clearly a swimming sport, that is hardly the only skill necessary. It has been suggested a perfect water polo athlete is best described as having the over-arm accuracy of a baseball pitcher, vertical of a volleyball player, toughness of a hockey player, endurance of a cross-country skier, strength of a wrestler and strategy of a chess player. Of course, to find a player of this ability is difficulty. To become this type of player requires dedication and training with a sound nutrition program.

## Nutrition and Water Polo

It is difficult to play a game as demanding physically as water polo and not have the energy to perform at your best level until the sound of the buzzer. The game is interspersed with intense sprints to the ball, fighting off a “mugging” opponent in front of a blind ref and an occasional break from a foul or shot clock buzz – and all of these while not touching the bottom of the pool (yeah, right!). Goals are tough to come by, and you certainly do not want a lack of success to come down to what you did eat or did not eat before the game.

## Nutritional Guidelines

Because of the known energy systems explained in the Hyperstrike Workout article, some general guidelines can be followed in order to prepare and recover between practice sessions and competitions.

Here are some guidelines:

- Eat approximately every three to four hours to maintain insulin levels and aid in physical and mental recovery.
- Eat complex carbohydrates (starches) at a ratio of five to seven g/kg bodyweight (2.5-3.5 g/lb bodyweight) (1). For example, a 70 kg (154 lb) male needs 350 to 420 grams of carbohydrates per day. Starchy foods such as pasta, wheat bread, whole grain cereals, brown rice, potatoes, yams, sweet potatoes, and vegetables provide a major energy source to fuel your activities. These foods are also a source of fiber, vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients – the health protective substances in plant foods.

- Choose protein sources at a ratio of 1.2–1.6 g/kg bodyweight (0.54-0.86 g/lb bodyweight) from turkey, chicken, eggs, fish (although cold water fish have higher fat content, these are much needed healthy fats), lean cuts of beef, tofu and low-fat cottage cheese (1).
- Choose healthy fat sources from nuts, avocados and cold-water fish. Eat 40 to 100 grams of fat per day. If you do not get enough of these, take an essential fatty acid supplement or fish oil supplement (one to two tablespoons each day).
- Keep drinking water or sport drinks to maintain hydration while training. Try to avoid water-like substances such as Kool-Aid, sodas, juice or lemonade. Although these may contain water and some carbohydrates, they also contain a greater amount of the wrong type of carbohydrate source (sucrose and/or fructose), which can ultimately lead to gastrointestinal (GI) distress (i.e. diarrhea) and decreased performance.
- Eat a diet that consists of a wide variety of foods by keeping in mind the basic food groups. It is the best insurance for getting needed nutrients.
- Consume 25 to 35 grams of fiber per day among the foods that you eat. High fiber foods include whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and cereals. Read labels and be aware of fiber content in everything you eat.
- Avoid high-fructose corn syrup and excessive table sugar, even when trying to gain weight. These include candy, juices, desserts, baked goods, etc.
- Use meal replacement shakes, fruit smoothies or bars whenever necessary. Always keep bars available such as in a book bag, purse, glove compartment, locker, or wherever poor nutrition might be the alternative such as at a competition. Try an assortment of brands to see which you like.
- Take a multivitamin/mineral supplement from a reputable brand.
- Before going to bed, eat a light snack such as peanut butter on whole-wheat bread and a glass of skim milk.
- Only certain supplements may be beneficial for golf.