Half-time snack for second half boost?  [1]

Dear Alice,

My soccer coach is suggesting we eat bananas at half-time of our soccer game to rebuild our energy for the second half. I understand that bananas are a very good source of energy, among other things. I don't see any detriment to this idea, but my question is this: Does the consumption of bananas result in an immediate energy boost? I have always been led to believe that food must be digested through the system before the body realizes the benefits, and that usually takes several hours. Can you enlighten me?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Many athletes wonder whether they should eat before, during, and/or after their workouts and which foods are best to eat at which times. Research seems to indicate that snacking on carbohydrates and staying hydrated during an extended workout (an hour or more of vigorous exercise) may keep athletes energized and prevent fatigue. Also, keep in mind that carbohydrates are the brain's major source of energy ? keeping your brain well-fed can help you think clearly, focus on the game, and maximize your performance potential.

Our bodies are able to change rates of nutrient breakdown based on the body's energy demands (e.g., when we shift from mild exercise/stretching to more strenuous exercise). But, depending on body type, gender, age, type of exercise, and other factors, the body can only absorb a maximum of about 1.0 to1.5 grams of carbohydrate per minute. That means that eating more than about 60 to 75 grams of carbohydrate per hour while working out will not benefit you, and it may even cause you to feel sluggish or to have an upset stomach.

A banana is a great source of carbohydrate, as well as potassium, folate, and other nutrients. An average-sized banana is about 35 grams, so you can figure that your body will be able to digest that banana and get those nutrients to your working muscles within 25 to 35 minutes after eating it. You may not experience a surge of energy, but following your coach's suggestion may help you to stave off fatigue through the second half of your soccer games. Bananas also have other benefits such as preventing muscle cramping and cardiovascular irregularities.

Lots of foods and drinks (not just bananas) make great snacks that help you maintain your energy without upsetting your stomach. If you'd rather to take in calories in a liquid form during a game, you might want to try sports drinks or 100 percent fruit juice at half-time. Or, you may
prefer denser energy sources like energy bars.

Either way, the best way to determine what snacks will help you to perform at the top of your game is to experiment with different foods and drinks. Experimenting with new snacks should be done at practice, not on game days? you won't want to find out in the middle of a game that your new half-time snack actually makes you feel sick.

Game on!

Alice!
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