How soon after eating should workouts begin? [1]

Dear Alice,

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Answer

Dear Reader,

There are a few practices that can help minimize stomachaches and increase the benefits of a workout following a meal. Consider the following:

- **Breakfast of champions.** It sounds cliché, but it's true: Eating a balanced breakfast is a good idea every day, and especially on workout days. If you're going to do your workout immediately after eating, a smaller breakfast is recommended. If you're getting up at the crack of dawn and can't stomach the idea of eating a meal beforehand, consider a small snack like a granola bar or an apple before you exercise.

- **Size matters.** Of your meal, that is. Depending on the size of your meal, digestion can take between one and four hours. If you have consumed a larger meal, it may be better to wait longer to begin your workout. After eating a smaller meal, waiting an hour or a little less should be fine.

- **Go with your gut.** Many people like to snack during a workout. This is fine as long as it makes you feel good. People vary in terms of digestion while working out, so do a little experimenting and see if this works for you.

- **Hydrate!** It is a myth that drinking water before a workout causes side aches or stomach cramps. Hydration is necessary for a healthy workout and recovery. Not being fully hydrated can raise body temperature and blood pressure, and may cause muscle cramps. Hydrate before, after, and during your workout.

- **Attention!** For people with diabetes or other existing conditions, meal timing may take on additional importance. It's best to consult with a health care provider or registered dietitian to discuss options and tips to keep yourself in check.

- **Post-workout?** After a workout, it's likely you're body will want and need to replace some of the energy you've just burned. Research is mixed on the exact type of nutrients (carbohydrates, protein), so think healthy and satisfying (apple with peanut butter, low-sugar smoothie, yogurt with a small scoop of low-fat granola).

Everyone's metabolism is slightly different. Generally, it can be trouble to ask your digestive system to compete with your muscles for blood supply and energy so eating a "buffet like
meal" right before exercise can feel not-so-good. That said, a general rule of thumb is to time your meal eating so you have enough energy while exercising, but don't feel overly full or nauseous. The ultimate answer will really come from you. Let these tips be a guide and have a little fun experimenting until you find the balance that best supports your goals.

Happy exercising!

Alice!

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