

# Nutrition Basics for Dance Rehearsals & Performance

## Fueling Athletes and the Arts

### Athlete Scenario

*During performance season, with endless rehearsals, I find myself not getting hungry or feeling like there is no time between breaks to eat a meal or snack. I feel less energized and struggle to complete the choreography at my best. I also don't want to eat anything that is going to upset my stomach during rehearsal or when I get out on stage to perform!*

### Goals

- Provide nutrition strategies to meet energy demands for days with long rehearsals and performances.
- Consider nutrition timing for peak performance.

### Fueling Challenges

- Little time to eat during breaks.
- Avoidance of restroom use when wearing elaborate costumes leads to reduced fluid intake.
- Traveling for performances, making meal/snack consistency difficult.

### Nutrition Strategies

#### Daily Energy

Dancers need food to fuel their bodies and brains for energy to perform and to remember choreography; most need to eat a meal or snack every 3-4 hours.

#### Variety

A well-balanced eating pattern includes:

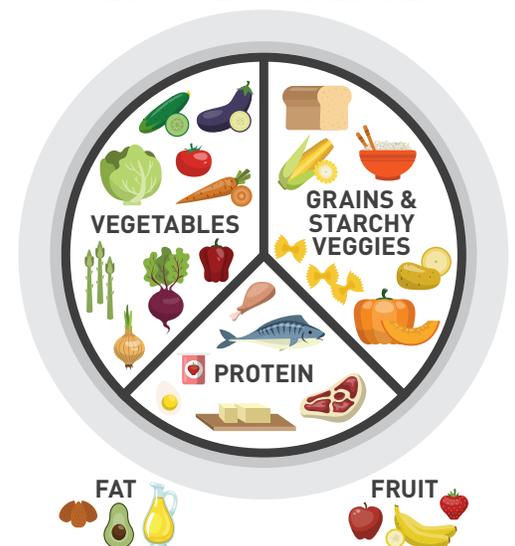
- protein (fish, poultry, meat, eggs, nuts, beans, dairy, soy)
- non-starchy vegetables (carrots, cruciferous vegetables, leafy greens)
- starchy vegetables and grains (rice, pastas, breads, oats, quinoa, potatoes, corn)
- fruits (apples, berries, oranges, bananas)
- fats (nuts, butter, oils, seeds, avocados)

Starchy vegetables, grains, and fruit provide carbohydrates for energy. Protein supports muscle growth, repair, and the immune system. Healthy fats promote recovery and may help reduce inflammation. Refer to the **Dancer's Plate** for how to build a balanced meal.



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### DANCER'S PLATE



## Timing

- **Eat a meal 3-4 hours before dancing.** Meals can include fiber-rich carbohydrates, moderate protein, and moderate/low-fat.

*Suggestions:* Egg & cheese on an English muffin with fruit and cup of milk; overnight oats with dried fruit & yogurt; turkey wrap with avocado & baked chips; peanut butter & jelly sandwich with hummus & crackers.

- **Eat a pre-dance snack 1-2 hours before dancing for an energy boost.** Include carbohydrates that are easy to break down and a little protein.

*Suggestions:* Fresh, diced fruit; granola bars; bread with nut butter & drizzle of honey; crackers or pretzels & cheese.

- **Eat a snack or hydrate during breaks.** This helps maintain energy during long rehearsals and performances.

*Suggestions:* Diced fruit or fruit pouches; granola bars; energy chews; sports drink that contains carbohydrates.

For those not able to tolerate much food during training, consider sipping on a nutrition shake high in carbohydrates.

- **Eat recovery meals and snacks.** This helps replenish energy stores, repair muscle, and prepare the body for the next day of performance. If not eating a meal until 2-3 hours after activity, grab a recovery snack.

*Suggestions:* Make a meal that contains carbohydrates, protein, healthy fats, and colorful fruits & veggies! If consuming a snack before, try a protein shake, Greek yogurt, or nut butter on toast with a piece of fruit. For meals, consider a lean protein burger with avocado, side salad, & fruit; grilled chicken or cheese quesadilla with a salad & cup of milk; tofu & bean tacos with veggies & milk alternative.

## Hydration

- **Daily:** Aim for 8-12 cups of fluids to stay well-hydrated.
- **Leading up to performances:** Drink at least 2-3 cups of water and/or an electrolyte-enhanced beverage 2-3 hours before.
- **During performances:** Plan hydration during breaks (intermission, between dance numbers and acts); **with at least 1 cup** (or 4-8 sips) every 20 minutes.
- Monitor hydration by your urine color. It should be the color of lemonade and not apple juice!
- For more information on hydration refer to the SCAN fact sheets: *Exercise Hydration* and *Hydration for the Teen Athlete*.



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## Tips to Take With You

- Plan your meals and snacks before performance day. If traveling, research the performance location for food options. Keep shelf-stable snacks in your dance bag (pretzels, crackers, bars, fruit pouches, shelf-stable milks & shakes) to boost energy by eating every 3-4 hours.
- Use a cooler pack for foods that need to stay cold (cheese sticks, fruit slices, veggies & hummus) or make your own by freezing a bottle of water that you can drink later.
- Look for variety when eating meals. Refer to the Dancer's Plate when building meals to get all your nutrients.
- Hydration is important! Drink fluids throughout the day and keep a water bottle backstage to hydrate between performances.
- For more personalized nutrition and hydration information, consult a sports Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN).

**Contact SCAN:**  
[www.scandpg.org](http://www.scandpg.org)  
**800-249-2875**

Reviewed by SCAN's Athletes and the Arts Nutrition Team. The key to optimal meal planning is individualization. For personalized nutrition plans contact a SCAN sports dietitian or Board Certified Specialist in Sports Dietetics (CSSD) by accessing "Find a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist" at [findanrd.eatright.org](http://findanrd.eatright.org).