

THE NUTE (NUTRITION) GURU IMPARTS WISDOM ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL, WHOLE-FOODS NUTRITION FOR MIND/BODY WELLNESS.



Q Hey Nute Guru, I find that after I workout, I often have cravings for sugary foods. I feel very motivated after a difficult workout, but worry about losing progress once the cravings hit. How should I be handling these cravings?

A Various cravings for sweets, salty snacks, or even protein indicate there are foods you should be eating to recharge your body post-workout. Here are some reasons these cravings may occur, and how to curb them.

Tell me you've been here: You knock out a wildly difficult workout, pat yourself on the back, and go about your day. Then, the cravings hit. Regardless of what you may want to eat after a workout, there are certain things you technically should be eating to reset your body after you've put it through the ringer.

"Immediately after a workout, you want to use a simple sugar to open up your cells," says nutritionist Philip Goglia, PhD and co-founder of G-Plans, noting that a piece of fruit and a protein tend to do the trick. "Generally speaking, athletes want to use a fruit directly after a workout to open up their cells, to re-establish a glycogen pattern and then they insert their first main meal directly after that, like eight ounces of protein, like eight ounces of chicken with a starch, like a complex carbohydrate such as a potato, a yam, or rice, with a vegetable."

But let's say you walk out of spin class dying for a piece of chocolate, a big, juicy steak, or some other oddly specific craving. As it turns out, you're not just hungry for a well-earned snack—it may be your body's way of telling you exactly what it needs. I chatted with the experts to decode what our post-workout cravings actually mean, and how to curb them when they have us reaching for the cookie jar instead of the fruit and vegetable drawers.

If you're craving sweets...

Let's be real: We all know we probably shouldn't be grabbing for a handful of peanut butter cups after spending 45 minutes in plank pose, but what does it mean when your body is begging you to break into last year's Halloween stash? "Studies have found that people can tend to crave more sweets post workout. While more research is needed, it is hypothesized that the body is looking to restore glycogen," says registered dietician and Aromatherapy Associates wellness ambassador Nora Minno, RD, CDN, who notes that the research here is still a bit thin. "Studies have also shown that post-aerobic exercise, the part of your brain responsible for food-pleasure cravings, may be more active." If you can't resist a post-workout sugar fix, be sure to reach for the natural stuff instead of something processed.

To avoid sugary cravings altogether, Dr. Goglia notes that it's important to prep your body with the right nutrients ahead of time. "Some cravings are usually caused by mismanaged food programs. If you're eating the right things, you'll crave the right things," he explains. "If you're training 90 minutes or less early in the morning, you train low glycemically." To make up for this, he suggests eating a tablespoon of plain almond butter and a tablespoon of jam. This balance of sugar and fat will provide you with a higher caloric burn, ultimately give you better results from your training, and set you up for success post-workout as well (score and score!).

If you're craving salt...

If you're dying to rip into a bag of kale chips after a workout, it probably has something to do with how much of an actual sweat your sweat session worked up. "It means! your body had a high sweat rate while you were training," says Dr. Goglia. "And at that point, you can lightly salt your foods, but it's (more about) getting your sugar first and then lightly salted foods to replace the lost potassium and sodium." If you're training for less than 90 minutes, though, you shouldn't be too concerned with replacing the sodium in your body because it's unlikely that you're losing enough of it to make a real difference.

The goal after any workout or for any meal pattern is to keep it as simple as possible, so that your body completely understands what the nutrients are supposed to do," says Dr. Goglia. "You don't want to overload any one thing, for example." So even if you're tempted to up your salt intake after a super sweaty sesh, consider a well-balance meal with a sprinkle of sea salt.

If you're craving protein...

Good news: You're on the right track. Nutritionally speaking, the best thing you can eat after a workout is a balanced combination of carbs and protein, but this "balance" may differ depending on your body type and the type of workout you've completed.

"The main difference will be in the calorie content and the amount of carbs and protein, since this is based widely on body weight, and calorie expenditure," says Minno. "Those performing more rigorous workouts will most likely need more calories post-workout than those completing less vigorous workouts. It's also important to note that whenever building a meal plan for yourself, you need to look at your total daily intake of calories, protein, fat, and carbs to make sure your specific needs are being met."

According to Dr. Goglia, the type of animal protein you reach for to fill these cravings should depend on the time of day. He says to eat chicken mid-day rather than at dinner time. "The proteins best consumed at night are lean red meats (like filet, flag or hanger steak) and fatty fish (salmon, sea bass, black cod, or arctic char)," he explains. "The reason why you consume these fattier proteins at night is because the fat, the omegas of the fish, promote a deeper sleep and are anti-inflammatory, so you sleep deeper, sleep faster." And as we all know, sleep is pretty much the most important way to recharge post-workout anyhow.