

Healthy Snacks for Dancers

February 2015

By: Mandy Copenhaver (Grassi), RDN LD



Mandy trained with Saint Louis Ballet School from the age of 3 until she graduated high school and became a company member with Saint Louis Ballet for the 2005-06 season. In 2009, she graduated Magna Cum Laude from Saint Louis University with her Bachelor of Science Degree in nutrition and dietetics with a minor in psychology and completed her dietetic internship at The Christ Hospital in Cincinnati, OH. She is a Registered and Licensed Dietitian Nutritionist and has worked with a variety of populations in weight loss, wellness, sports nutrition and child nutrition. She currently lives in Cincinnati, OH with her husband, Sean and their 4 month old daughter, Sydney. Mandy visits her family in Saint Louis often and loves to catch a SLB performance when she is in town.

Do you ever feel exhausted in the middle of ballet class or feel like you just can't make it through rehearsal without

running out of steam? Like a car needs gas to run, our bodies to fuel (food) to run as well. However, the fuel that you choose for your body can either help improve your performance or hurt it.

We have all heard that a healthy diet should consist of a balance between carbohydrates, protein, and healthy fats. The same goes true for dancers, but how and when you eat these foods can make a world of difference.

The most important food group to provide immediate energy for any athlete is carbohydrates, particularly complex carbohydrates such as whole grains. Complex carbohydrates keep you full and provide sustained energy without causing a spike and crash in your insulin levels. Good sources of complex carbohydrates include whole grain crackers, whole wheat bread and brown rice.

Protein is also extremely important for dancers. Protein breaks down slower than carbohydrates, thus providing lasting stored energy. Protein is also essential for repairing muscles after class and rehearsals. Protein also helps keep you full and provides you energy well after you have burned through the carbohydrates. Some great sources of protein include nut butters such as

peanut or almond, turkey, fish, low fat/fat free dairy and eggs.

Healthy fats such as monounsaturated fats are essential to keeping your skin looking healthy and your organs functioning properly. In addition, fats provide your body energy once you have burned through the carbohydrates and the protein, meaning that fats can provide some energy towards the end of a long class or rehearsal. A few sources of healthy fats include nuts (raw is best), olive oil and avocado.

Now that we have discussed the separate components of energy, let's put these nutrients together to form a list of go to snacks to keep you fueled and healthy during class and rehearsals.

Eat one of these portable snacks 1-2 hours before class to give you the energy you need to keep your stamina up from your first pli   to your last reverence:

12 baby carrots and    cup hummus

Half a natural peanut butter or almond butter (1 TBSP) and honey (1 tsp) sandwich on whole wheat bread

Deli turkey sandwich on half a whole wheat bagel: 1 ounce deli turkey, 1 slice avocado, 1 tsp mustard

Natural peanut butter or almond butter (1 TBSP) on 1 banana or 1 sliced apple

Yogurt (1 cup) and fruit (a half cup of your favorite)

Homemade trail mix (see recipe)

1 apple and 1 piece of string cheese

2 cups air popped popcorn with 1 TBSP peanuts

1 Larabar

1 hardboiled egg on 1 piece of whole wheat toast

Homemade Trail Mix Recipe

- 10 Almonds
- 5 Cashews
- 1/8 cup Craisins or Raisins
- 1 teaspoon Chocolate Chips

Overall, snacking is essential to keep you energized and help you to perform your best. Remember to keep hydrated as well and you will certainly notice a difference in your dancing!

