

What's in your Tackle box?

Helping junior swimmers tackle their school day!

Imagine you are off for a day of fishing and you forgot your tackle box. No hooks, bait, sinkers or extra line means, none of the tools necessary to fish successfully. Now imagine a young swimmer without their lunchbox at school (their tackle box). Like a person going fishing without a tackle box a swimmer going to school without a suitably stocked lunch box (nutrition tackle box) can significantly impact successful recovery throughout the day.

A young swimmers lunchbox, filled with the right foods, will assist them completing their recovery adequately and continue their preparation for the afternoon session. Like all other aspects of a swimmers training nutrition the swimming nutrition jigsaw is critical throughout the school day. As young swimmers may be eating the majority of their food intake away from the home, making sure their lunchbox is packed with well planned appropriate food choices suitable for swimming performance is essential.

A junior swimmers nutrition tackle box needs to contain all the pieces of the swimming nutrition jigsaw.

This "Nutrition tackle box' needs to contain:

Revitalising foods

School is a key period for the consumption of revitalizing nutrients. As this period will potentially account > 50% of their opportunity to eat swimmers should aim for a rainbow of colour in their nutrition tackle box. This includes Fruit (at least 2 pieces of different colours) to provide nutrient dense carbohydrate, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, phyto-nutrients and fibre. Vegetables (whole or on sandwiches or wraps, in salads) to provide essential vitamins, minerals, anti-oxidants and phyto-nutrients for good cellular and immune function.

Rebuilding foods

Foods containing appropriate protein ($\approx 15-30g$) is essential at all meals and snacks to ensure the continual repair and development of muscle tissue. This means including lean high quality protein sources such as lean meat, chicken, fish (eg. tuna or salmon), eggs, dairy products, nuts (if appropriate), beans, or

tofu in sufficient amounts to provide the required (\approx 15-30g of high quality protein).

Replacing foods

Replacing carbohydrate stores throughout the day is essential to continued training performance. This is of particular concern on hard double training days. Swimmers should ensure their replacing carbohydrate foods are high in other nutrients and should avoid energy dense carbohydrate foods. Swimmers should focus on nutrient dense replacing foods such as high fibre whole grain bread and cereals (like pasta, rice, couscous, barley, and quinoa), fruit and vegetables to restore glycogen in the muscle and prime for the afternoon's training session.

Rehydrating Fluids

Cool fluids should be available to swimmers throughout the day to maintain a suitable hydration status (preferably water). This does not mean relying on unnecessary energy dense flavoured fluid sources (like juice, cordials, soft drinks) unless an individual swimmer's daily energy requirement requires it.

The Tackle box

Food safety should be an important focus of a swimmers nutrition tackle box. Their tackle box should have the capabilities of keeping food cold for extended periods (eg 6-8 hours). This may require the use of an ice pack or frozen food products that defrost over the day before consumption. Strategic packing of foods so that the swimmer eats risky foods first rather than pre-afternoon training can also ensure food safety is maintained.

The early teenage years are an important time point to educate swimmers on performance food choice to help them develop optimally during the pubertal years. Teenage males often have high-energy needs and may struggle to consume adequate food for their training and growth. Female swimmers, on the other hand, often increase in body fat during puberty and may struggle with physique management during their teenage years. By ensuring young swimmers have good nutrition practices during their early school years, make this transition into adolescence easier and ensure they reach their swimming potential.