

Engineered Sports Foods: A Primer

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Remember water, bananas and defizzed Coke-the original sports fuels? Maybe not. They've been buried by a multitude of engineered sports foods and fluids created by the \$2+ billion sports fuel industry! Since the 1970's, when Gatorade was introduced, this business has mushroomed and continues to expand. PowerBar's debut in the 1980's and GU's debut in the 1990's bolstered the commercial sports food scene. Since then, a multitude of companies have jumped on the bandwagon to create niche fuels that appeal to a variety of athletes. There's a product for every dietary need-gluten-free, vegan, kosher, lactose-free, fructose-free ...

If you have ever felt confused by the plethora of commercial sports fuels from which to choose, you are not alone. Runners, cyclists and other athletes inevitably ask me "What's the best energy bar? gel? sports drink?" I only wish I had the right answer! The best choice for one person may be lackluster for another. You simply need to experiment to determine which products are best for your body.

In general, commercial sports foods tend to be more about convenience than necessity. They can make fueling easier, and offer more benefits than you'd get from just plain water. If you are on a budget, take note: A daily quart of sports drink @ \$1.59 adds up to more than \$570 a year. An equal number of calories from diluted, defizzed Coke might cost only 40¢ a day, \$150 a year. (OK, add a pinch of salt, if desired...)

Certainly, there is a time and place for engineered sports fuels, particularly if you are a high-level endurance athlete who exercises intensely. But throughout the day, you should maintain a foundation of wholesome foods in the midst of the engineered choices. That is, you need not drink a sports drink at lunch, nor eat Jelly Belly Sports Beans for an afternoon snack. Be sure you add a few apple cores and banana peels to the litter from engineered sports food wrappers!

Below is a comprehensive (but unlikely complete) list of various types of assorted sports fuels and foods. Perhaps it will help you untangle the jungle of choices. Don't be swayed by a product's name; it might be more powerful than the sports food itself...

SPORTS DRINKS

With sodium (and perhaps other electrolytes):

Gatorade, Edge Energy, Hydro-Boom!, GU2O, CytoMax, Clif Shot Electrolyte, Motor Tabs

All natural without dye/food coloring:

First Endurance EFS, Clif Shot Electrolyte Drink, Hammer Nutrition HEED, Recharge

Extra sodium (Good idea if you plan to exercise for >2 hours in the heat):

Gatorade Endurance, PowerBar Endurance, E-Fuel, First Endurance EFS, Clif Shot Electrolyte Drink, E-Load, Hydro Pro Cooler

Added "buffers": Cytomax, Perpetuem, Revenge Sport

Extra carbs: Perpetuem, Carbo-Pro

Added protein (May reduce post-exercise muscle soreness);

Amino Vital, Perpetuem, Accelerade, Revenge Pro

Sports drinks for dieters (i.e., lower calorie):

PowerAde Option, Ultima Replenisher, Xtra LowOz, Propel, Nuun

GELS (Test with these during training. They can taste very sweet and are common contributors to diarrhea)
Gu, Carb-BOOM!, Clif Shot, Honey Stinger (all natural)

Extra sodium: PowerBar Gel, Crank Sports e-Gel

Added protein: Accel Gel, Endless edge, Hammer Gel

Added caffeine: GU Espresso Love, Clif Shot Mocha, Cola and Strawberry; Carb-BOOM Chocolate Cherry, Hammer Gel Espresso, PowerBar Gel Double Latte, Tangerine, Chocolate, Green Apple and Strawberry-banana; Honey Stinger Ginsting and Strawberry

Added extras: EAS Energy Gel (taurine)

ENDURANCE FOOD

Jelly Belly Sports Beans (a jelly bean with sodium). Clif Shot Bloks (a soft gummi candy in a block), Sharkies (organic fruit chew), SPIZ (“liquid food”)

RECOVERY DRINKS (Carbs with a little protein)

Amino Vital, First Endurance E3, EAS Endurathon, Perpetuem, PowerBar Recovery Drinks, Recoverite, Go Energy Drink, Endurox R4, Gatorade Nutrition Shake, Hormel's Great Shake, GNC's Distance, Clif Shot Recovery Drink. First Endurance Ultragen

ENERGY DRINKS: (Concentrated sugar, often with added caffeine):

Red Bull, Rock Star, Monster, Rebound-fx, Full Throttle

ENERGY BARS (should be eaten for extra energy, not for a meal replacement):

All natural/organic ((have no added vitamins or minerals):

Clif Bar, Peak Energy, Perfect 10, Clif Nectar, Clif Mojo, Lara Bar, Optimum, TrailMix HoneyBar, Odwalla Bar, PowerBar Nut Naturals, Honey Stinger Bars, Kashi Bars

Granola-type bars: PowerBar Harvest, Nature Valley Granola Bar, Quaker Chewy Bars, Nutri-Grain Bar

Women's bars (fewer calories; soy, calcium, iron and folic acid):

PowerBar Pria, Amino Vital Fit, Luna Bar, Balance Oasis

40-30-30 Bars: Balance Bar, ZonePerfect

Kosher: Pure Fit, Lara Bar, Extend Bar

Dairy-free: Clif Nectar, Pure Fit, Perfect 10, Lara Bar, Clif Builder's Bar

Gluten-free: Perfect 10, Elev8Me, Hammer Bar, Clif Nectar, EnvirKids Rice Cereal Bar; Omega Smart Bars, Odwalla Bar, Clif Builder's Bar , Extend Bar

Fructose-free: JayBar

Vegan: Pure Fit, Lara Bar, Hammer Bar, Vega Whole Food Raw Energy Bar, Clif Builder's Bar, Perfect 10

Low fiber: Balance Bar

Bars with caffeine: Peak Energy Plus

Vitamin & protein-pumped candy bar: Marathon Bar; Detour Bar

Recovery bar (4:1 carb:pro ratio): PowerBar Performance

PROTEIN BARS (Your choice of soy, whey, egg, or blended protein source):

PowerBar ProteinPlus, EAS Myoplex Delux, High 5 Protein Bar, Maximuscle Promax Meal, USN Pure Protein, Atkins Advantage, Tri-O-Plex, Clif Builder's Bar, Detour Bar, Honey Stinger Protein Bar

MEAL REPLACEMENT BARS (offers 10-15 g protein, fiber, some fat, vitamins, minerals-but not really enough calories for a whole meal):

Kashi Go Lean Bar , Balance Satisfaction, MetRx Mr. Big, MET-Rx Big 100 Colossal

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