

MAKE YOUR OWN REFUELLING SNACKS

Tired of the same old, sickly energy bars? Help is at hand! Sports nutritionist Anita Bean provides eight quick and easy recipes for nutritious, delicious snacks you can make at home

Y

our bike, kit and training are all lovingly personalised, so why shouldn't the same care and attention go into your snacks? Mass-produced, pre-packaged energy drinks and bars are great for convenience, but often not so tantalising in the taste department. Why settle for anything less than delicious, given that creating your own snacks really is simple and enjoyable?

Of course, the purpose of pre-ride and

on-board fuelling is to keep blood sugar levels within optimal range and supply additional fuel to your muscles. This reduces the rate at which your muscles burn glycogen and thus helps stave off fatigue. Result? Better performance and endurance. In other words, you need to make sure the bars and drinks you're eating contain top-quality carbs.

A healthy post-ride snack will help to replenish glycogen levels and repair damaged fibres in your muscles. Eating or drinking some protein and carbs, ideally within two hours of finishing

(if you ride twice a day), will help you recover more quickly.

Sure, there's a vast market of packaged options out there but try these homemade alternatives, which will power your ride just as well, if not better. These recipes combine tasty, nutrient-packed ingredients, and they're all super-easy and quick to make, requiring no special cooking skills or techniques. Each recipe gives you a nutritional breakdown, so you can see how it contributes to your daily goals or work out how many you'll need to take with you on the bike.





The home-made way to fuelling your ride

5-INGREDIENT PEANUT BUTTER COOKIES

This is by far the easiest cookie recipe ever! If you're a peanut butter fan, then you'll love this. I've substituted oats for some of the flour in traditional cookie recipes. As a result, the cookies are considerably higher in protein, monounsaturated fats, fibre, vitamins and minerals than conventional cookies.

Makes 12

- 125g (4oz) peanut butter
- 70g (2½oz) dark brown sugar
- 70g (3½oz) butter or dairy-free spread
- 75g (3oz) oats
- 75g (3oz) plain white flour

1. Preheat the oven to 190°C/fan 170°C/Gas mark 3 and line a baking tray with baking paper.
2. Place all the ingredients in a food processor and process on high speed until you have a smooth, fairly stiff dough, for about one minute.
3. Form mixture into walnut-sized balls. Place on the baking tray, about 2.5cm (1in) apart, then flatten lightly with your hand. Bake for approx. 12 minutes or until light golden. Cool for a few minutes before transferring to a wire rack.

1. Heat the oven to 190°C/fan 170°C/Gas mark 5. Line a 23cm (9in) square baking tin with baking parchment.
2. Place the dates in a small saucepan with enough water to just cover. Cook the dates for five minutes until soft. Drain off most of the water and purée with the honey in a food processor until smooth.
3. Mix the cinnamon, oats, nuts, raisins and salt in a large bowl, add the date purée and mix until well combined. Press the mixture into the lined tin, smoothing the surface so it is even on all sides. Bake for 20 minutes or until the mixture feels firm and the edges are just starting to come away from the sides. Cool in the tin then cut into bars. They can be stored for up to a week in an airtight tin.

■ **Per serving:** 228kcal, 5g protein, 11g fat (1g saturates), 25g carbs (17g total sugars), 4g
Credit: The Vegetarian Athlete's Cookbook

FRUIT AND NUT BARS

These easy-to-make bars are a tasty alternative to manufactured energy bars. The natural fats in the nuts and oats help prevent blood sugar spikes, giving you more sustained energy. They're packed with protein, essential fats, vitamins and minerals and make a perfect pre- or post-ride snack.

Makes 12

- 200g (7oz) soft dates
- 2 tbsp honey
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- 125g (4oz) rolled oats
- 100g (3½oz) chopped roasted hazelnuts
- 50g (2oz) flaked almonds
- 50g (2oz) chopped walnuts
- 50g (2oz) raisins
- A pinch of salt



More oats, less flour = more protein

BANANA NUT BREAD

Banana bread is a classic snack for cyclists, so I was inspired to adapt it and make it healthier. In this recipe, I've substituted light olive oil and Greek yogurt for the butter, replaced some of the sugar with the natural sweetener Stevia, and added some dates to help sweeten the bread instead of so much sugar. I added walnuts too as they're loaded with omega-3 fats.

Makes 10 slices

- 225g (8oz) plain flour
- 3 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 4 tbsp light olive oil
- 2 tbsp low fat plain Greek yogurt
- 50g (2oz) Sugar with Stevia (e.g. Tate & Lyle) or 100g (3½oz) light muscovado sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 2 eggs
- 2 ripe bananas
- 100g (3½oz) soft dates
- 100g (3½oz) walnut pieces

1. Preheat the oven to 160°C/fan 140°C/Gas mark 3. Line a 900g/2lb loaf tin with baking parchment.
2. Place the flour, baking powder, cinnamon, olive oil, Greek yogurt, Sugar

- with Stevia (or sugar), vanilla extract and the eggs into a large mixing bowl. Mash the bananas and chop the dates (using kitchen scissors) and add to the bowl. Beat the mixture for two to three minutes, using a wooden spoon or hand-held mixer, until well blended. Fold in the walnut pieces.
3. Spoon the mixture into the prepared tin and level the top. Bake for one hour or until a skewer inserted in the centre comes out clean. If not, bake for a further 10 minutes. Leave in the tin for 15 minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack to cool.

■ **Per serving:** 285kcal, 6g protein, 13g fat (2g saturates), 35g carbs (14g total sugars), 3g fibre
Credit: The Vegetarian Athletes' Cookbook



A nutritious twist on a cycling classic

Homemade v manufactured

With the huge array of sports drinks, gels, bars and chews now available, you'd be forgiven for thinking these products are essential for performing well. But it's worth remembering there was a time when cyclists ate actual food and still set world records.

The main benefit of packaged products is their convenience; they come in wrapped portions that fit neatly into jersey pockets, are easy to eat while cycling and deliver a known amount of calories and carbs. On the downside, some cyclists find these products sit 'heavy' in their stomach and cause gut problems, particularly during the latter stages of races or long rides. This may be down to excessive consumption or too high a concentration of simple sugars.

One solution could be switching to real foods and homemade snacks, which you may find easier to digest and less likely to trigger gut symptoms.

Pre-packaged products won't enhance performance any more than good-quality conventional foods. A US study in 2012 showed that bananas were just as effective as sports drinks in increasing performance in a 75km cycling time trial. Cyclists consumed 0.2g carb/kg of body weight every 15 minutes in the form of a sports drink or bananas. It made no difference where the carbs came from; the cyclists performed the same. Another study found that raisins were just as effective as energy chews for improving performance in a 5km time trial (following an 80min submaximal run) compared with water.

CHERRY AND ALMOND FLAPJACKS

This flapjack makes a tasty pre- or post-ride snack. Dried cherries are packed with polyphenols which have powerful antioxidant properties and promote recovery after hard exercise. They also add vibrant colour. Almonds are great sources of unsaturated fats, protein and calcium.

Makes 12 flapjacks

- 75g (3oz) honey
- 75g (3oz) olive oil spread or butter
- 75g (3oz) almond butter
- 75g (3oz) brown sugar
- 250g (9oz) oats
- 75g (3oz) glace cherries
- 75g (3oz) flaked almonds

1. Pre-heat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/gas mark 4. Line a 20cm (8in) square baking tin with baking parchment.

2. In a small pan, heat the honey, olive spread and almond butter over a gentle heat until the mixture has melted. Remove from the heat. Put the remaining ingredients in a large bowl, add the honey mixture and mix until evenly combined.

3. Transfer the mixture into the prepared tin and press down well with the back of a spoon. Bake for 20-25 minutes. Cool for

about 20 minutes (it should be firm but still warm), then slice, cool and store in an airtight container.

■ Per flapjack: 195kcal, 4g protein, 9g fat (1g saturates), 23g carbs (8g total sugars), 2g fibre
Credit: *The Runner's Cookbook*



Colourful and packed with protein

COCOA AND ALMOND ENERGY BALLS

These compact little snacks are perfect for fuelling during long rides. Wrap in cling film or foil, pop in your pocket, consume one every 20 to 30 minutes. They provide a healthy mix of carbohydrate and protein, along with iron, B vitamins, zinc and magnesium. You can substitute cashews or hazelnuts for the almonds if you prefer.

Makes 16 balls

- 100g (3½oz) ground almonds
- 125g (4oz) Medjool dates*
- 75g (3oz) rolled oats
- 2 tsp nut butter
- 1 tbsp cocoa powder

*Or use standard dried dates: Leave them to soak in boiling water for 10-15 minutes, then drain.

To coat:

Cocoa powder, sesame seeds, finely chopped pistachios, finely chopped mixed nuts, desiccated coconut, or chocolate chips

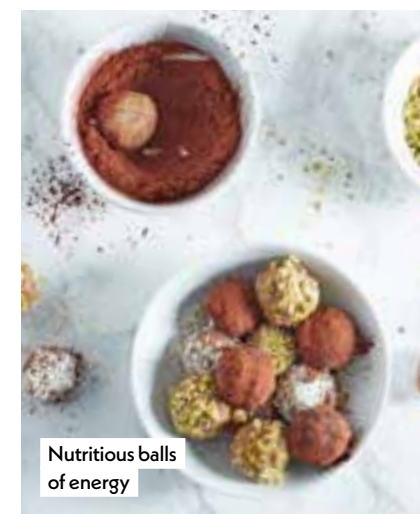
1. Place the dates in a food processor with the almonds, oats, nut butter and cocoa powder, and process for two to three

minutes until you have a very stiff paste. You may need to scrape down the mixture from the sides of the bowl a few times.

2. Take a small amount of mixture and roll it between your hands to make small, bite-sized balls. Choose your coating, spread it onto a large plate, then roll each ball around until nicely coated.

3. Place in an airtight container and store in the fridge for up to a week, or in the freezer for up to three months.

■ Per ball (with cocoa powder coating): 86kcal, 3g protein, 4g fat (0g saturates), 9g carbs (5g total sugars), 1g fibre
Credit: *The Runner's Cookbook*



Nutritious balls of energy

MOCHA SMOOTHIE

When you need a pick-me-up before a long ride, this smoothie is the perfect drink. It's made with coffee to give you a bit of a mental boost before your ride. Caffeine helps increase stamina and alertness and may make cycling feel a little easier. The cocoa provides that rich dark chocolate taste and some bonus antioxidants too.

Serves 1

- 50ml (2floz) milk
- 125ml (4floz) plain yogurt
- 1 shot espresso
- 2 tsp cocoa powder
- 1 banana
- Pinch of cinnamon
- A few ice cubes

1. Blitz all the ingredients in a food processor until smooth.

■ Per serving: 189 kcal, 10g protein, 2g fat (1g saturates), 31g carbs (29g total sugars), 2g fibre
Credit: *The Runner's Cookbook*



Go natural to go long

Jasmijn Muller, current national and world 24-hour TT champion, had to abandon her first attempt at breaking the Land's End to John o' Groats record last September owing to gut issues. She has since had a serious rethink of her nutrition strategy, swapping to a more natural approach:

"One of the big changes has been to steer away from commercial sports gels and bars full of artificial ingredients. It is baffling to think that as athletes we take great care to follow a healthy diet but then consume a lot of ultra-processed products on race day. Riding at a lower speed and intensity and being more fat-adapted, I don't function well on too many carbohydrates. It makes me feel bloated and I end up puking. There are very few

commercial energy bars that I like the taste and consistency of. Also, I fear what my dentist would say after consuming so much refined sugar for days on end.

"This year I started using bars made with dates and nuts. They are tasty and easy to handle both on and off the bike. I also use homemade baby food pouches, some sweet, some savoury, and homemade rice cakes. I also make my own drinks with diluted coconut milk, chia seeds and some maple syrup or I mix instant oats with oat milk, a little avocado oil and cinnamon. And bananas remain a favourite snack.

"The new strategy will hopefully contribute to success when I have another crack at the LEJOG record in September."

ALMOND, APRICOT & CHOCOLATE BARS

The addition of dark chocolate chips to these healthy fruit and nut bars makes them taste wonderfully decadent. Cocoa and dark chocolate are both rich in polyphenols, which help improve levels of nitric oxide and increase oxygen delivery to muscles during endurance exercise. Need a better excuse?

Makes 10 bars

- 150g (5oz) Medjool dates*
- 100g (3½oz) dried ready-to-eat apricots
- 125g (4oz) ground almonds
- 1 tbsp cocoa powder
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 25g (1oz) dark chocolate chips

*Or use standard dried dates: Leave them to soak in boiling water for 10-15 minutes, then drain

1. Place the dates in a food processor with the apricots, almonds, cocoa powder and cinnamon, and process until the mixture starts to clump together. Add the chocolate chips and pulse until it forms the consistency of stiff cookie dough.

2. Press into a thick square, roughly 18cm x 18cm (7in x 7in) in size between two sheets of clingfilm or baking paper. Alternatively, you can press it into an 18cm x 18cm (7in x 7in) baking tin lined with cling film. Chill for one hour or until firm. Cut into bars, then wrap each bar in cling film. Cut into 10 bars.

3. Store in the fridge for up to a week or in the freezer for up to three months.

■ Per bar: 156kcal, 4g protein, 8g fat (1g saturates), 16g carbs (15g total sugars), 3g fibre
Credit: *The Runner's Cookbook*



The healthy way to enjoy chocolate