

Special needs when playing on the road

Most serious players are well-seasoned travellers, and will spend much time travelling and living far away from home. These trips are often short, but may involve longer spells of travel for tournaments or pre-season tours. Competition is usually organised in a national or regional league that requires weekly or bi-weekly travel to matches. Frequent travel over long distances can pose a number of challenges:

- Disruptions to the normal training routine and lifestyle while the player is en route
- Changes in climate and environment that create different nutritional needs
- Jet lag after crossing multiple time zones
- Changes to food availability including absence of important and familiar foods
- Reliance on hotels, restaurants and takeaways instead of home cooking
- Exposure to new foods and eating cultures
- Temptations of an “all you can eat” buffet-style dining hall
- Risk of gastrointestinal illnesses due to exposure to food and water with poor hygiene standards
- Excitement and distraction of a new environment



Some keys points for eating well while travelling include:

1. Planning ahead

Investigate food patterns and availability at your destination before leaving home. This may help in planning useful food supplies to take on trips that can replace missing and important items. Contact the catering organisers at the destination to let them know of special needs for meal timing and menus. Make an eating plan for travel that incorporates the best of the available food supplies (e.g. airline catering, restaurants en route) as well as self-supplied snacks.

2. Eat and drink well while on the move

Recognise that enforced rest while travelling will reduce energy needs, but create more opportunities for high energy intake if the player succumbs to “boredom eating”. Be aware of eating only when there is a real need. When moving to a new time zone, adopt eating patterns that suit your destination as soon as the trip starts. This will help to adapt your body clock. Be aware of unseen fluid losses in air conditioned vehicles and pressurised plane cabins. Have a drink plan that helps maintain hydration.

3. Be wary of food and water hygiene

Find out whether it is safe to drink the local water supply. If risky, stick to sealed bottles of water and other drinks or hot drinks. Be wary of ice added to drinks – it is often made from tap water. In high-risk environments, stick to food produced in good hotels or well-known restaurants. Avoid eating food from local stalls and markets, however tempting it is to have an “authentic cultural experience”. Stick to food that has been cooked well, and avoid salads or unpeeled fruit that has been in contact with local water or soil.

4. Choose well from local cuisine and supplement with non-perishable food supplies brought from home

Ideas for portable supplies for the travelling player

Breakfast cereal and powdered milk
Cereal and breakfast bars
Rice cakes
Spreads – honey, jam, peanut butter
Powdered sports drinks and liquid meal supplements
Sports bars
Dried fruit and nuts

5. Use clever tactics in restaurants, all you can eat dining halls, and when choosing takeaways

Stick to an eating plan based on what is normally eaten at home or what meets new nutritional needs rather than being mesmerised by all the food available. Be assertive in asking for foods to be prepared to individual needs – for example, with low fat cooking methods, or with an added carbohydrate serving. Avoid hanging around in restaurants or dining halls for entertainment – it can often lead to unplanned and unnecessary eating.

Remember that normal eating patterns probably involve well-timed and well-chosen snacks. If new catering arrangements provide only for main meals, ensure that the menu at meals includes some items that can be taken away for snack needs.

