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## **Rugby Nutrition:**

### **Travel Nutrition**

When traveling for rugby competitions, you will be faced with several of the following challenges:

- Jet lag (crossing time zones), travel fatigue and time spent in transit on a plane or a bus, may result in sleep disturbances, appetite and gut changes (constipation/diarrhoea). Sleep, training and eating routines may also differ as well as the quality, quantity and even the timing of the food served on the plane. <sup>[1]</sup>
- The absence of familiar food and home cooking in the new destination, budgetary constraints, menus in a foreign language, the temptation to try new foods and supplements and the general excitement and distraction of the new environment will all impact on your nutrition.
- Environmental and hygiene conditions may affect your health and increase your risk of illness.

In addition to these challenges, your nutrition requirements change with tapering and competition and you need to adjust your diet accordingly.



Here are some nutrition strategies that can help counter some of these stressors <sup>[2]</sup>:

Investigate the food service (food choices, meal times, dining room and team room arrangements etc.) at the destination **before** leaving home. If possible, liaise with caterers in advance to let them know meal timing and menu needs. If food is served 'buffet style' this can encourage 'over-eating' and 'menu fatigue' and it may be beneficial to work out individualized plans together with a dietitian with sports nutrition experience.

1. Ideally, you should work towards adopting destination sleep times, and if possible, even training and meal times in the week before departure.
2. On board the flight, set watches to the destination time and adapt meal and snack times accordingly. Exercise and move around as much as possible – walking, standing and stretching in the seat helps to reduce swelling of legs and feet. If you arrive at night, avoid sleeping in the plane close to arrival time. If you arrive in the day time, rather than going to sleep, get outdoors for exposure to sunlight which helps adjust the body clock. <sup>[1]</sup>
3. Don't leave things to chance. Otherwise you risk the chance of going from hero to zero and letting you and your team down. **Make a plan** to accommodate for the disruption in meal times, the low volume of food served on many airlines and the need for extra fluid. Water, mineral water, juices (including tomato juice) and sports drinks are the best fluid choices. Consider the effect of caffeine on wakefulness and avoid taking alcoholic beverages during and after flights. Avoid eating out of boredom on the flight.
4. It may be useful to pack in portable carbohydrate-rich snacks (breakfast, dried fruit, sports and cereal bars, trail mix and nuts, fresh and dried fruit, lean biltong). Besides biltong, most of these snacks are also rich in fibre which will help prevent constipation. Ensure that all food supplies that you travel with, comply with the airline regulations or the customs and quarantine regulations of the country you are visiting, travelling to or competing in.

5. Check out issues around **food and fluid hygiene** in new environments. To prevent “traveller’s diarrhoea”, practice strict hand hygiene at all times and pack in an anti-bacterial hand wash. Limit exposure to germs via handshakes, sneezing (elbow sneeze) and make sure you wash hands with soap for 30 seconds before each meal and dry them with a clean towel or dryer. Drink boiled or bottled drinks and don’t share bottles, avoid ice in drinks, eat foods that have been peeled or cooked, and avoid raw, uncooked fresh foods (meat, fish, shellfish, and eggs), unpasteurized dairy products and reheated foods in countries where food hygiene may be inadequate. Be wary of buying street food and avoid food that has been sitting in warm places for extended periods of time (>2 hours).
  
6. The importance of rest and adequate sleep can help prevent illness. You may want to consider taking your own pillow. Foods rich in probiotics (some yoghurts and probiotic drinks or yakult) can also help boost your immune system.
  
7. Drug interventions: the use of any medication, drug, nasal spray or supplement to reduce fatigue and jet lag and enhance immunity should only be taken on the advice of the team doctor.

For more information on *Rugby Nutrition*, go to the BokSmart website [www.BokSmart.com](http://www.BokSmart.com) or go to the following link: <http://boksmart.sarugby.co.za/content/eating-and-drinking-right>

## REFERENCES

1. Reilly T, Atkinson G, Edwards B, et al. Coping with jet lag; a position statement for the European College of Sport Science. *Eur J Sport Sci* 2007; 7:1-7.
2. Lundy B and Broad E. Travel. In: *Sport and Exercise Nutrition*. First Edition. 2011. The Nutrition Society. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.