KEEP MOVING, KEEP FIT…NUTRITION AND SPORTS

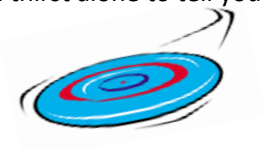
Whether you're training for a competitive sports event or just keeping in shape, what you eat is important to how well you do.

What to eat and drink?
There is no one special diet for athletes. For top performance, you simply need to eat a variety of foods from all the food groups. Getting at least the recommended number of servings in all the food groups will supply the nutrients and the calories that your body needs. For most people, working out or playing hard at a sport does not mean that you need more of any specific nutrients, *except water and calories.*

The most essential nutrient an athlete needs is water—just plain water. Without enough water, you can't work at your best and you may harm yourself. When you work out, you need extra water because you lose water by sweating and breathing hard. Sweating is important because as sweat evaporates from your skin, your body cools down. If you don't have enough water in your body when you start to exercise, or if you don't replace the water you lose while you're exercising, you can become dehydrated.

Dehydration can be dangerous. It means you can no longer sweat to get rid of heat that builds up as you exercise. You can suffer heat exhaustion, heat stroke, or problems with circulation.

To avoid any chance of dehydration, drink plenty of cool water before, during and after physical activity—even if you do not feel thirsty. You can't count on thirst alone to tell you when your body is becoming dehydrated.



Physical activity burns calories; so the harder and longer you work, the more calories you burn. And you need those calories for energy! The number of calories an athlete needs depends on body size, age, whether you're male or female and the level of training. If you need more calories, you can get them from eating more than the recommended servings of food-group foods, and then from a few extras.

Training diet
Are you training for a particular competition—a 10K, a wrestling match, a bike race? Or do you work out intensely day after day? A training diet may differ from your normal diet in one respect: it is probably higher in carbohydrates.
When you exercise, you draw on energy stored as carbohydrates in your muscles. During a two-hour workout, you can easily use up all your stored carbohydrates, which means you get fatigued. To make sure you get plenty of carbohydrates, include more vegetables, fruits, breads and grains—along with the recommended servings from all food groups. This "carbo-loading" a few days before the competition helps ensure that your muscles have sufficient stores of energy.

So, it's right before the big competition. What do you eat now? Carbohydrates are still important, especially for activities that take longer than an hour.

The meal you eat just before the competition is particularly important. Some guidelines include:

- Eat the meal at least 2 ½ to 3 hours before the activity.
- Choose foods low in fat.
- Drink plenty of water

High-carbohydrate foods pass quickly through your stomach and get to your muscles. High-fat and high-protein foods stay in your stomach much longer, and during competition which may cause indigestion, nausea and even vomiting.

What about recovery?
Chocolate milk is a great sports recovery drink! Chocolate milk has the right amounts of carbohydrate and protein to help the body recover more quickly after exercise. It helps replenish muscles and provides fluids and "electrolytes" such as potassium to assist with rehydration.

To refuel after activities, kids should consume a meal or a snack consisting of protein and carbohydrates within 30 minutes. Some suggestions are:

- Chocolate milk
- Whole-grain crackers and cheese
- Yogurt with fruit slices
- String cheese and fruit
- Fruit smoothie with milk
- Pita chips with hummus
- Granola bar with yogurt

Fact or Fiction?

There are many rumors about the effect of the foods you eat on your performance. Let's try and separate fact from fiction.

Myth #1

You need extra protein to build muscle. **NOT TRUE.** There is no evidence that excess protein creates more muscle. In fact, excess protein fat and carbohydrate—will be stored by the body as fat.

Myth #2

Vitamins will give you more energy. **NOT TRUE.** Not one of the known vitamins supplies energy (calories). Some vitamins do help the body use energy in foods. But you get plenty of these vitamins from a balanced diet. Large doses of vitamins won't give you more energy or improve your endurance.

Myth #3

Eating sweets just before competition will give you a "quick energy lift." **NOT TRUE.** Actually, eating high-sugar foods, such as candy and soft drinks, right before activity may hurt your performance, as sugar causes chemical reactions in your body that can make you feel tired or weak. Consuming sweets during competition, however, does not have that effect.

Myth #4

Performance is enhanced by gaining weight. **NOT TRUE.** Some athletes want to gain weight; some want to lose. A pound of body fat equals 3,500 calories. So, to gain a pound, you need to eat 3,500 calories more than your body uses; to lose a pound, you need to use 3,500 calories more than you eat.

To gain weight, you eat more, of course. But if you just eat more and don't exercise, you'll gain fat. To make sure those extra calories become muscle, not fat, you must exercise. Realistically, you can gain about two pounds in a week.

To lose weight, you don't just eat less. If you don't take in enough calories, you won't get the energy you need for training and competition. The fastest and easiest way to lose weight is with a combination of diet and exercise. You can expect to lose one to two pounds a week. If you lose weight faster than that, you may begin to lose muscle, too.

Remember…

No food, drug or nutrient can quickly and easily build muscles, increase speed, or improve endurance. Instead, athletes need a combination of good nutrition and training over a period of time.