

Eating Healthy, Not Supplementing

In order for athletes to truly achieve their health and fitness goals, it is imperative that they develop healthy eating habits. In this basic guide to nutrition, there are two main players in the nutrition arena – carbohydrates and protein. A diet rich in carbohydrates increases endurance performance because of the extra store of carbohydrates in the muscles and liver, called glycogen. If athletes do not consume a diet high in carbohydrates on a daily basis, they will experience chronic fatigue and poor performance. Protein has always been a particularly popular nutrient with athletes because of its role in building and maintaining muscles. Indeed, athletes need to consume a wide variety of high-quality protein foods in their diets. However, *while protein is necessary, it is not the primary fuel for working muscles and consuming more protein than what the body can use is **not** going to give athletes larger and stronger muscles.*

RECOMMENDED INTAKE OF CARBOHYDRATES

Athletes should consume at least 50 percent, but ideally 60-70 percent of their total calories from carbohydrates. This percentage is only a guideline for estimating carbohydrate needs. Depending upon the length of training sessions, an athlete's carbohydrate intake should be between 2.5-6.0 grams per pound of body weight, with longer training times reflecting the higher number of grams needed.

RECOMMENDED INTAKE OF PROTEIN

Type of Training - Grams (g) of Protein Recommended

Endurance - 0.54-0.64 g of protein per pound of body weight

Strength - 0.72-0.81 g of protein per pound of body weight (to gain muscle mass)

Strength (maintenance) - 0.54-0.64 g of protein per pound of body weight

Reducing intake of refined sugars (cookies, candy bars etc.) and saturated fat (butter, doughnuts etc.) and eating plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains is a must for athletes. Keep in mind that food is fuel and athletes should not come to practice or games without having had enough food to support the energy requirements for their sport. To keep athletes properly fueled and have protein needs met, use the **EAT guidelines**:

Eat breakfast. It is the best way to start the day well fueled. Include foods that contain carbohydrates and protein such as nonfat milk, yogurt, or eggs.

Add carbohydrates and protein to post exercise meals. Some energy bars provide carbohydrates to replenish muscle glycogen stores and protein to help build and repair muscles.

Toss the supplements. Athletes should rely on protein from food sources first, instead of supplements. This helps ensure that diets are balanced for health and performance. In addition to meat sources of protein, dairy products, nuts, and seeds are all rich sources of protein and can easily be added to any meal or snack.

Peak athletic performance and improved physique require sound nutritional habits. Athletes can get their daily requirements of nutrients through whole food. We do not advocate the use of supplements and "performance" enhancing supplements: Creatine, ephedrine, DHEA, C4, etc. because of the possible side effects.

It is very important not to overlook the role nutrition plays in acquiring maximum physical development. What you eat on a daily basis helps determine your body fat levels as well as how much energy you have for intense, rigorous exercise. Whether athletes are trying to gain muscle, reduce body fat, or maintain their current build - it is imperative they follow these basic dietary recommendations:

- A balanced diet consists of approximately 60-70% carbohydrates,
- 15-20% fat and 10-15% protein.
- Eat a variety of healthy foods (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, etc.).
- LIMIT your intake of fat, sugar, and sodium.
- Drink plenty of WATER! (# of oz. = ½ body weight...180# = 90oz of water)
- Eat 5-7 "smaller" meals throughout the day (size of meal depends on actual goal: weight loss vs. weight gain).

Nutrition plays a critical role in athletic performance. Athletes, coaches, and parents need to realize that making wise food choices can increase the chances of optimal athletic performance.