

Nutrition Guidelines for Optimal Athletic Performance

An athlete's performance is very dependent upon his/her level of preparedness physically, mentally, and nutritionally. It is understood that physical and mental preparedness are key ingredients for athletic success, but often time's nutritional preparation is overlooked. Proper nutrition is one of the most important factors when desiring one's best performance. Everyone understands that foods are broken down and then used for energy (fuel), but what most people do not know is that all foods are broken down differently and the type of food consumed can affect one's mental state and energy level. For an athlete, this is of great importance. If an athlete is prepared physically and mentally for a competition and he/she has not taken the proper steps to fuel the body with the proper nutrients it needs to perform, performance may be hindered.

Athletes looking to perform at their best during a practice or during a competition should avoid fatty meats, fried foods, and foods that contain shortening and large amounts of sugar. Examples include: soda, candy, french fries, cakes, cookies and fatty red meats.

To ensure that an athlete is getting the proper nutrition, he/she needs to focus on eating foods rich in complex carbohydrates daily. Complex carbohydrates burn cleanly in the body and help stabilize blood sugar, also resulting in higher levels of sustained energy. Complex carbohydrates also contain fiber. Fiber aides in the performance of the body's metabolism, Great sources of complex carbohydrates are: Pasta, Macaroni, Spaghetti, Brown Rice, Potatoes, Vegetables, Whole Grain Breads, Pita Bread, Bagels, Whole Grain Cereals, High Fiber Breakfast Cereal, Old Fashioned Oatmeal, Corn, Yams, Peas and Beans.

Practice or Competition Day

Athletes should avoid the consumption of simple sugars before a game. Simple sugars cause a rapid rise in blood sugar and then cause a rapid drop in blood sugar leading the athlete feeling tired, weary and groggy during a competition. It is best to go into an event a little hungry. Athletes should avoid eating 2-2.5 hrs before a practice or competition to maximize energy requirements.

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During Practice or Competition

Simple sugars can be a great source of fuel if the intensity of the training or game

After Practice or Competition

It is important to drink a sports drink immediately after a training session or game. This allows the energy stores that were depleted during the exercise to be replenished. This will aid in increasing the athlete's ability to recover from the training stress. Protein is an essential component that helps increase the body's ability to recover from intense exercise. Meals that follow a workout or competition should consist of a balanced amount of carbohydrate and protein. A ratio of 1 gram of protein to every 4 grams of carbohydrate will adequately meet maximal or at a near maximal level. An athlete's respiratory rate (breathing) is a good measure of his/her intensity. These sugars are found in numerous sports drinks on the market. To avoid stomach discomfort it is important to drink no more than 20 oz of fluid during a 45 min session. Consumption of fluids should be done through consuming small amounts frequently. It is important not to intake large amounts of protein, this will cause stomach discomfort and can interfere with the athlete's energy level and hydration status. Great sources of protein are: Eggs, Chicken, Turkey, Lean Red Meats and Milk.