NUTRITION AND YOU

What you eat before, during, and immediately after an exercise session can dramatically affect both your performance and recovery time. Something as simple as drinking water throughout the day can make a big difference in how you feel after your next workout. Experiment with the following tips to find the right approach to fuel your individual needs and goals.

BEFORE EXERCISE

Drink water

As a general rule of thumb, consume a minimum of eight eight-ounce glasses of water per day. Generally you should drink enough so you are urinating a clear color throughout the day.

You can drink water up to two hours before a workout without worrying that your exercise will be interrupted (since the kidneys require about 60 to 90 minutes to process excess liquid). Shortly before your workout, drink about eight-ounces of water so that you'll have a sweat loss replacement readily available.

Eat a diet rich in complex carbohydrates, moderate in protein, and low in fat

Start with breakfast. It's true, breakfast really is the most important meal of the day — if you're skipping it you're making a big mistake. Try peanut butter on banana bread, raisins, or yogurt if you don't have time to sit down for a real meal.

You shouldeat approximately 60 percent of your calories from carbohydrate rich foods, or about 6 to 10 grams of carbohydrates per kilogram of your body weight per day. If you're eating a low carbohydrate diet, your muscles will feel chronically fatigued. The complex carbohydrates found in potatoes, pasta, grains, and dried beans are essential for maintaining high energy for training.

Protein is necessary for building and repairing muscles

Athletes may require a little more protein than an average person, about 1.5 grams per kilogram of body weight. For athletes with very high-energy needs, about 15-percent of your daily calories should come from a balanced diet that includes a variety of protein-rich foods like fish, chicken, and beans. Fat, our most concentrated source of food energy, plays the important role of storing energy and fat-soluble nutrients. Twenty-five percent of your daily calories should come from fat.

Most athletes want to know what is best to eat before exercising and how far in advance to eat it. There's no magic formula, the ideal meal will vary by individual and it's best to experiment with trial and error to determine what works best for you. Generally, most people find that smaller meals can be eaten two or three hours prior to a workout. Allow one to two hours to digest blended or liquid meals and less than an hour for a small snack, according to your own tolerance level. Always allow more digestion time before intense exercise than before low-level activity.

DURING EXERCISE

Drink water!

Try to drink enough water to equal sweat loss during your workout. You'll need to drink 16 ounces of water for every pound you lose in sweat. Some people can lose up to five to seven pounds of sweat per hour during strenuous activity. Generally water alone is enough to fuel any event or workout lasting one hour or less.

If your workout is longer than an hour, drink a dilute carbohydrate hydration-replacement solution that contains electrolytes. The benefit of dilute beverages is that they empty from the stomach much more quickly than more concentrated alternatives. Beverages containing about 13 to 17 grams of carbohydrate per cup are ideal. This equates to a 7 percent carbohydrate solution. During long workouts you should consume 100-300 calories of carbohydrates per hour in addition to water.

You guessed it, drink water!

After a hard workout, one of your top priorities should be to replace the fluids you lost by sweating and replete the muscle reserves.

In addition, eat a small, balanced snack of carbohydrates and protein to help your muscles recover quickly immediately after a workout.

Experiment to find what works

Your body is unique. Only you can judge what does and doesn't work. Experiment with different approaches during training sessions to discover what's best for you!