

General Nutrition Tips for Athletes

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If you are a competitive athlete, you probably don't need advice on training techniques. We can, however, point out a few nutrition tips that will give you an edge over the competition. To begin with, it is especially important for you to eat a diet high in complex carbohydrates. This nutritional program is a perfect way to load your body with carbohydrates everyday. Eat a complex-carbohydrate-only meal three to four hours prior to your daily work out. This will load your liver's carbohydrate fuel tank and help prevent hypoglycemic symptoms from appearing during your workout.

During aerobic exercise, up to 10 percent of your energy comes from the breakdown of muscle tissue protein. Therefore, it is wise to have some protein after your exercise to prevent breakdown of your muscle tissue. Within an hour after your workout, eat either a low-fat flesh or low-fat dairy protein meal. Remember that both of these meals should also contain a substantial amount of complex carbohydrates, which will reload the stores of carbohydrates in your liver and muscles.

About 20 to 30 minutes before your workout, you should drink 13 to 20 ounces of water. You should also drink 8 to 10 ounces of water every 15 minutes during a prolonged training session or competitive marathon race. This helps prevent overheating and dehydration during exercise. Like the water in your car's radiator, the water in your bloodstream transports the heat generated from your exercising muscles to the surface of your body, where it escapes, primarily through sweat. You lose between one and three quarts of water per hour during exercise, so dehydration can occur quite easily. Losing 3-4 percent of your water volume through perspiration can decrease endurance performance by up to 30 percent. Further water loss can result in serious dehydration or even heat stroke. Incidentally, as well as being more refreshing, cold water 5 degrees C (or 40 degrees F) is absorbed into the bloodstream much faster and more efficiently than water at room temperature.

Profuse sweating also results in the loss of electrolytes and minerals. You should take approximately one gram of salt for every quart of water you drink during exercise to prevent a life-threatening condition known as hyponatremia (very low concentration of sodium in the blood). This is most critical if the event will last more than 2-3 hours.

When your aerobic exercise session ends for the day, replace the fluids in your body just beyond the point of satisfying your thirst. Thirst is a reasonable good indicator of your fluid needs, but by the time you get thirsty during exercise, your blood volume is already down by at least one quart of water. In other words, you are already approaching dehydration. So remember: drink before, during, and after exercise.

The best drink to have after exercise is one part of any juice and three parts of cold soda water. The juice will provide carbohydrates to restore your blood sugar quickly and will

also provide potassium to replace what you lost in perspiration. The soda water will re-establish the proper balance of water and electrolytes in your bloodstream. You can also use any of the common carbohydrate sports drinks, which provide similar benefits.

Some recent research indicates that athletes use vitamins B2 and B6 faster than other people. Both of these vitamins are necessary for energy production. Aerobic athletes may also be more likely to sustain oxygen damage to their muscles during exercise. Studies indicate that much of this tissue damage can be minimized by supplementing vitamin E, vitamin C, and beta-carotene in doses of 200-400 I.U., 500-1,000 mg, and 10,000-20,000 I.U., respectively. Therefore, it is advisable that aerobic athletes take a multiple vitamin and mineral tablet to supplement the nutritional program. Be sure that the multiple vitamin you choose contains no more than 3,000 I.U. of vitamin A to prevent the risk of toxicity.

There is no question that good nutrition and fluid replacement have a major impact on athletic performance. Use a sound nutritional program to complement your aerobic-endurance training-capitalize on the competitive edge.

References:

The Meschino Optimal Living Program: 7 Steps To Healthy, Fit, Age-Resistant Body (2nd edition – 2009) James P. Meschino DC, MS, ND (www.adeeva.com)