



We are what we eat – Nutrition (Part 1)

This article is the first of a six part series that will focus on nutrition, and will hopefully provide athletes with the necessary tools they need to achieve their goals. The topics I hope to cover include nutrition goals and eating strategies, proteins and carbohydrates, hydration and finally the controversial issue surrounding supplement intake.

Every athlete knows that in a competition, even a split second can make that difference between winning or losing, scoring a goal, making that save or preventing the other team from victory. Every moment counts and therefore several factors can have a huge impact on player performance. An important factor that will make that difference between victory and failure is what athletes put into their bodies, in short, nutrition.

What we drink and eat will have a significant impact on our physical performance. Diet influences how well an athlete is able to train for a competition and is what transforms a performance from good to great. Once an athlete is already training hard to transform his or her body from minimal to maximal performance, it makes no sense to ignore diet, when this can also heavily impact performance. Since there are several different types of athletic activities, it is difficult to prescribe a general diet that meets the needs of all athletes due to the different demands required by these activities. Some activities require greater speed, endurance, power, technique or strength and therefore no diet can meet these different requirements at once. Additionally, body size, physique, physiological and biochemical characteristics also differ between individuals and make it difficult to list specific guidelines for diet that will apply to people with such diverse physical makeups.

Healthy food choices make all the difference and there are several benefits that arise from making smart choices of what to put into one's body. The amount of food one needs to eat is something that is very much dependent on the energy needs of the athlete. Calculating how much energy an athlete needs is dependent upon the activity performed during training and competition, as well as energy that is expended outside of these activities. If an athlete trains regularly, he or she will need much more energy, especially when training sessions are lengthy and tough. On the other hand, when an athlete trains irregularly or if an athlete's training sessions are much less demanding, or shorter, significantly less energy will be needed. Another important factor to take into consideration is that many athletes will have an on-season and an off-season, periods of time of more and less physical activity (also including periods of time where athletes may be recuperating from injuries) and as a result, energy demands are lower and diet must be adjusted accordingly to these new demands.

Many people are under the impression that body weight is a good predictor of energy, however, this is not the case. Keeping track of body weight is a complicated process and often the information collected can be misconstrued.

Now that I have provided basic background information to understand why nutrition is not simple hocus-pocus, we are ready to delve more in depth into the issue in Part 2.

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