

SPORTS NUTRITION

The Importance of the Nutrition in Sports



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Sports nutrition is becoming increasingly important over the years. Since the early ages of Olympic Game in ancient Greece, it was well known that proper nutrition and sport performance were related. During the 1900's, with the birth of modern sport, experts started to evaluate the physiological effect between nutrition and sport. They were still far from real scientific study and demonstration. At that time it was more



of an instinct just by understanding the body. Sometimes people believed in wrong ideas, for example, to give different meat to the sprinters and the marathoner, in order to transfer the sprint or endurance skills from the animal to the athletes.

Later, people understood a very important concept that right nutrition doesn't guarantees a good performance, but surely a bad diet could compromise an athlete's performance. Mistakes with nutrition close to the match directly impact for the final result. Fatigue, sickness, and low focus are only some of the effects of the wrong nutrition. Nowadays, nutrition is considered to be a very important part of sport recovery process.

In addition to energy intake and the quality of the food, another concept was discovered recently, that is NUTRITIONAL TIMING. It is a diet strategy of distribution of the meals and snacks related with type, timing and intensity of training.

The sport nutrition objectives are different from classic diet. In that it focuses on the following:

- maximizing energy
- decreasing recovery time
- modulating inflammatory response

It is important to optimize the energy reserves allocated to the effort. Every meal of the day from breakfast to dinner is designed to supply the muscles with the right amount of glycogen that will provides immediate energy during exercise and also to restore the reserves depleted in sports activities.

It is also very important to be careful with hydration which is often neglected at every sport level. A 2% body water can increase heart rate and decrease speed. There is also an increase of the fatigue level and decrease in motivation of the athlete.

The creation of a nutrition plan is fundamental for the athletes, especially if the athletes are in the development age. A typical plan starts with careful analysis of the eating habits, then continue with chemistry and hormone exams, anthropometric evaluation of lean mass and fat mass, hydration status and in the end the cell mass of metabolically active muscle.

It is important to maintain the right quantity of the lean mass for all the seasons, sometimes by increasing or decreasing the fat mass quantity. Excess body fat is related with a decrease of the performance in each sport that requires body motion with speed, strength, endurance, dexterity and jump skills.

In the end of the workout, human body produces a pro-oxidant substance which can cause an inflammation. With proper nutrition, it is possible to modulate these process so as to decrease possibility of injuries and shorten the recovery time.

Last but not least, is the theme of onset of eating disorders among the younger athletes. Wrong advises, impression from the coaches or family, and low self-esteem are only some of the causes of reduction in energy intake. Therefore, it is important that every coach, in contact directly with the athletes, be educated to identify the disturbing behaviors, and work with the sports nutrition specialists, doctors and physiologists. This team work is very helpful for prevention and early identification of issues, and timing implementation with the right nutrition plan for treatment.



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