WellConnected

A Virtual Wellness Program for Student Athletes

WellSpan Sports Medicine

8 Key Nutrition Facts to Eat Up

- **Fact 1 -** Every athlete is different, which means each athlete has individual nutritional needs based on their sport, gender, lifestyle, training level, and more. The good news is that there is a way all athletes can strive to meet their unique needs by following a daily routine that focuses on nutrition balance, variety, and quality.
- **Fact 2 -** A daily routine that focuses on the recommended balance of various high-quality protein, fat, and carbohydrate-based foods helps optimize an athlete's physical and mental performance.
- **Fact 3 -** Carbohydrates are the primary energy source for athletes, providing the energy they need for optimal endurance, strength, and overall performance. In terms of quantity, each athlete's carbohydrate requirement varies and is dependent on their training level. For instance, those athletes in harder training periods/seasons need more carbohydrate intake than those performing at moderate or easy training levels, and similarly, those athletes in moderate training periods/seasons need more carbohydrate intake than those performing at easy training levels.
- **Fact 4 -** In general, athletes have higher protein needs than non-athletes, which can be met with usual, everyday foods. This protein intake then allows athletes to one, utilize the energy obtained from carbohydrates more effectively during activity and two, promote optimal muscle health and strength during and following activity.
- **Fact 5 -** Fat intake is required in every athlete's diet. Eating high-quality, healthy sources of fat, found in oils, nuts, seeds, fish, and more, is what helps athletes round out their diet for optimal fuel intake and usage.
- **Fact 6 -** Staying hydrated is imperative for athletes. To do so, athletes should begin exercise in a hydrated state and drink throughout activity as desired. This then allows for greater athletic performance, reduced injury risk, and reduced likelihood of suffering from muscle cramps. Moreover, it has been shown that a 2 to 3% weight loss due to dehydration following activity can increase one's temperature, heartrate, and fatigue as well as cause headaches, nausea, cramps, and overall poor performance.
- **Fact 7 -** No one is immune to developing an eating disorder or disordered eating condition regardless of age, gender, or sport. Additionally, those who suffer from an eating disorder or disordered eating are at a heightened risk for developing secondary conditions including impaired mental health, decreased bone health, increased injury frequency/risk, decreased concentration, decreased strength, coordination, and/or speed, decreased energy levels, decreased immune system efficiency, increased soreness, delayed performance recovery, and more.
- **Fact 8 -** Teammates are often the first ones to notice a fellow athlete's eating disorder or disordered eating. Signs to look out for amongst your fellow athletes include new mood/personality changes, avoidance of team meals or group celebrations involving food, rejecting foods they used to love, discussing feeling guilty after eating, and exercising excessively either regularly or after meals.

Optimal Exercise-Based Nutrition Routine

- **Before Exercise**
  - Choose to either (1) eat a meal 1 to 4 hours before activity with an emphasis on carbohydrates, a moderate serving of protein, and small amount of fat and fiber, or (2) eat a snack 30 to 60 minutes before activity with a focus on carbohydrates, staying low in protein, fat, and fiber intake
  - Drink one water bottle (16 ounces) 2 to 3 hours before exercise and half of a water bottle (8 ounces) 15 minutes before exercise
- **During Exercise**
  - Drink 4 ounces (2 to 3 large gulps) of fluid every 15 to 20 minutes
  - If exercising longer than 60 to 90 minutes, consume 30 to 60 grams of carbohydrates per hour, this can be done with sports drinks or snacks
- **After Exercise**
  - Drink 16 to 20 ounces of fluid for every pound lost to restore fluids and electrolytes lost through sweat
  - Within 45 minutes to 2 hours following activity, strive to eat snacks or meals with high-quality sources of carbohydrates, fat, and protein to replenish the body, replace muscle fuel burned, repair muscle damage, promote muscle growth, and optimize recovery/preparation prior to the next workout

If you, a teammate, or anyone you know has questions regarding how to meet specific nutritional needs, wants more information on nutrition and sport performance, or is currently struggling with disordered eating, we encourage you to contact Beth Conway MS, RD, LDN at (717) 851-1702.