Sports Nutrition

Whether you are a serious athlete or an avid user of the gym, you probably are aware that nutrition can affect your physical performance, as well as your recovery. Here are some tips and information to help you maximize your physical activity efforts and separate fact from fiction.

Pre-workout

The best time to eat is 1 to 2 hours before an intense workout. Some people are more prone to exercise induced nausea than others, so use your own personal experiences to determine when you can eat. A well balanced meal of 200-300 calories, that includes a modest amount of protein, carbohydrate, and fat is best. The carbohydrates will give you energy, which the protein and fat can give you building blocks for recovery and slow down the release of sugar into your blood. Some examples:

- A banana with 1 tablespoon of peanut butter
- Low-fat yogurt and a piece of fruit
- Oatmeal made with skim milk and fruit
- Trail mix with nuts and fruit
- Granola with low-fat milk and fruit
- A smoothie made with low-fat yogurt, fresh fruit, and wheat germ or flax meal

Use common sense - if you are going to be doing 20 minutes of leisurely cardio you will not need as many calories as you would if you are going on a 3 hour run.

Hydration

The best way to hydrate before, during, and after your workout is with cold water. If you exercise intensely for over an hour, and/or train in a very hot environment then an electrolyte replacement with some sugar such as Gatorade may be necessary.

Hydration guidelines:

- 2 cups of water (1-2 hours before exercise)
- Sip on water during exercise (4-6 gulps every 10 to 15 minutes)
- 2 cups of water for every pound lost after exercise. This will replace fluid lost as sweat.
Signs of dehydration:

- Thirst, dry mouth
- Weakness, fatigue
- Nausea, vomiting
- High body temperature
- Muscle cramps?legs
- Dizziness, confusion
- Weak, rapid heart rate
- Lack of coordination & judgment

Post-workout

Along with replenishing the fluids lost via sweat, you need food to replete nutrients lost during activity. Muscle glycogen is quickly used up to fuel a workout, and is repleted by eating carbohydrates. During more intense exercise and weight training, muscles need protein and fat to repair and grow.

However, only modest amounts of food are necessary, unless you are training for an extended period of time. A huge meal post-workout can cause weight gain if you don?t balance calories burned with calories consumed. And, while protein powders are popular among weight lifters they are not only unnecessary but chronic use can burden the kidneys due to the very high process protein content.

A balanced meal or snack with 1-3 servings of carbohydrate and 10-20 grams of protein is all most active people need. Some examples:

- 2 hard boiled eggs and a cup of fruit
- 1 tbs almond butter on whole wheat toast
- ½ each beans and rice
- Veggie stir fry with 1 oz meat

More than just calories

Along with extra calories coming from carbohydrates, protein and fat, your body also needs extra vitamins and minerals.

- Potassium is lost through sweat and urine, and helps to regulate muscle contractions. Regular exercisers should eat extra fruits and vegetables for more potassium
- Athletes training for more than 4 hours per week deplete iron quicker than non-exercisers. Increasing intake of red meats, leafy greens and legumes can lessen the risk of anemia.
- Work out regularly? Make sure to fill your diet with fruits, veggies, lean meats and beans and limit refined carbs.

Have more specific questions about nutrition and athletics? Email nutrition@ucsf.edu or make an appointment with the SHCS Registered Dietitian by calling 476-1281.