

Increase your performance by eating more effectively!

We are what we eat! You cannot run a high performance car on bad fuel ... the same holds true for your body. If you put in a great amount of training and commitment, you need to look at how to improve your diet as well. Listed below are several methods to optimize your performances through a better diet. This is not a 'crash program,' but comprehensive steps to help you be a healthier and better athlete. Try one modification at a time, or several at once, whatever you are comfortable with ... you'll feel the difference!

One: *Eat a good breakfast*

Don't try to practice on an empty stomach! Get into the habit of eating a balanced breakfast which includes high-carbohydrate foods (such as cereals, bagels or toast) in addition to fruit. It will give you energy throughout the day and especially at practice. Ideally, you should also have an early lunch or snack while at school, though avoiding greasy, fatty foods.

Two: *Drink more water*

Drink at least one big glass of water in the morning, in addition to every meal, and in the evening rather than just juice or soda. Drinking water up to 30 minutes before, during and after practice, also assures your body having enough fluids.

Three: *Eat more raw vegetables and fruit*

Fruits and vegetables help you meet your daily carbohydrate need and increase needed fiber. Green vegetables such as broccoli are especially nutrient-rich while orange or red vegetables and fruits, such as carrots or cantaloupe, are great sources of beta-carotene.

Four: *Increase your carbohydrate intake*

The most readily available source of energy for our bodies are carbohydrates such as breads, bagels, rice, pastas and potatoes. By increasing your intake of carbohydrates you will increase your body's energy reserves while supplying your body an excellent low-fat food.

Five: *Eliminate or reduce alcohol consumption*

Excess alcohol is a poison, and the body will work overtime to expel it, causing dehydration, which will hurt your performance and recovery. (Coach's Note: This is a youth club so there should be ZERO alcoholic consumption by all members of this team).

Six: *Eliminate artificial sweeteners from your diet*

Artificial sweeteners known as 'Saccharin' and 'Nutrasweet,' which are found in most diet sodas and no-sugar foods, constricts blood flow throughout your body and brain, and cause headaches if consumed in excess.

Seven: *Reduce caffeine intake*

Caffeine and other stimulants 'rev' up your nervous system needlessly and cause dehydration while disrupting your concentration and sleeping patterns, influencing your athletic and academic performance. Limit your consumption and avoid becoming dependent on the 'rush' of caffeine.

Eight: *Limit salt intake*

Most of the salt we need each day is in the food we eat, especially if it is mostly from restaurants, cans, or freezers. Try to avoid adding salt as too much will dehydrate and made it difficult for your body to pass nutrients to your muscles.

Nine: *Eat fewer highly sweetened foods*

Added sugars, such as sucrose, might cause your body to produce too much insulin, which can cause hypoglycemia or low blood sugar and leave you feeling weak.

Ten: *Avoid source of aluminum*

Sources of aluminum include canned sodas and beer, or food cooked in aluminum pots, as well as some antiperspirants. Aluminum, when absorbed into your nervous system, slows the transmission of nerve impulses and reaction time. There has also been a link between aluminum in the brain and the degenerating disease of Alzheimer's in older people.

Eleven: *Eliminate carbonated sodas*

Some soda drinks contain as much as eleven teaspoons of simple sugar per can, and many large amounts of caffeine. Such large amounts of sugar can spike your insulin levels, while large amounts of caffeine can interact with your body's ability to absorb calcium, which could reduce bone strength.

Twelve: *Reduce high-fat dairy products*

While low-fat milks and yogurts are good for you in limited quantities, dairy products can contain high levels of fat. Avoid whole milk, soft cheese, and ice cream. (Note: depending on the age of the athlete they may still need to drink whole milk, check with your pediatrician on this one.)

Thirteen: *Limit intake of preservatives and artificial food colorings*

Food additives and colorings are common in most processed foods, and may be linked to reducing the efficiency of the brain and nervous system.

Fourteen: *Reduce the intake of fats*

Excess fat in the diet slows your metabolism making you sluggish and making training more difficult. High-fat diets have also been linked to heart disease, stroke, cancer, and other ailments. Fat in excess can also increase your body fat and weight.

Fifteen: *Limit red meat in your diet*

Most Americans eat far more red meat than necessary to be healthy. Red meat is the main culprit of our fat intake, and a source of steroids and antibiotics which in the long run could be harmful to our bodies.

By adopting one or all of these modifications, you will notice the difference in how you feel and perform. Remember ... train hard, and also train smart by fitting all the pieces in the fitness puzzle together!

(SOURCES: Speed Dynamics; American Institute of Sport, and handouts from Bob Rush)