

Week of May 30, 2011

FUEL YOUR BODY

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Nutrition is important ALL THE TIME to keep the tank full for athletic training and performance. Athletes need to EAT TO TRAIN, not train so they can eat. In general, the athlete's diet should be composed of 60% carbohydrates, 15% protein, and 25% fat. Carbohydrates are necessary as the dominant fuel in moderate and high intensity activities. Carbohydrates provide the energy to keep your engine running through those long practices and intense races! Protein is not an energy source, but it is important because it builds and repairs muscles, produces hormones, supports the immune system, and replaces red blood cells. Fat plays a critical role in the overall functioning of the body; it aids in digestion and energy metabolism, helps maintain body temperature, and plays a part in regulating hormone production.

In order to maintain optimal training and performance energy levels, it is important that athletes eat early and often! Athletes should have a carbohydrate snack before morning workouts -- even if a small amount. (While some don't like to eat early in the morning, you can train your body to begin accepting food.) You should never go 3 or 4 hours without a snack during the day. It is better for swimmers to eat 6-8 times a day rather than just three meals a day. Athletes MUST have a carbohydrate snack immediately after practice. For proper muscle repair to begin, you have about a 30 minutes window to get some food in after practice. Within 1-2 hours of practice, swimmers should have a full meal. Without adequate fuel, swimmers will become fatigued and are more prone to injury as they are not helping their muscles recover.

Some excellent choices for your post-workout recovery snack might include chocolate milk, power bars, yogurt, bagels with peanut butter, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. The more you weigh, the larger your snack should be. For instance if you weigh 120 pounds, 1.5 power bars may be sufficient, but if you weigh 175, then you might need 1 cup of chocolate milk and a bagel with peanut butter.

Not only is getting adequate food important during regular training, it is also critical during meets to maintain peak performance. After racing, swimmers need to replenish fluids and eat a small snack. Sometimes a swimmer won't have quite enough time to warm down after a race and eating some food to help the recovery process along is just plain smart. Stuck at a summer league meet with no warm down at all? Keep moving around and eat a few peanut butter crackers before your next race!

Check out [USA Swimming's nutrition tracker](#) on the web to be sure you're getting enough! As we head outdoors into the 50 meter pool in just a few days, training demands will become greater and swimmers are likely to need more calories to sustain successful training.