

NUTRITIONAL CHEAT SHEET PART I

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Keep in mind that in order for nutrition to have an appreciable impact on your performance, you have to eat the right way on a year-round basis. Not that you can't occasionally indulge in some fast food, or sweets; just make sure that your daily diet follows the 80% rule, meaning that you make the right choices at least 80% of the time and reserve the other 20% percent for some of your favorite "cheat" foods. This way, you'll know you're supplying your body with the nutrients it needs to feel and perform at your best.

The following recommendations will help you stay on the right path:

The Right Kinds of Carbs

Make sure that the bulk of your diet comes from complex carbohydrate sources (approximately 50-60% of your total caloric intake). It's important that these carbs are predominantly in the form of whole grain breads and cereals, whole wheat pasta, brown rice, yams (or sweet potatoes) and beans. Try to stay away from white pasta, rice, breads and bagels as much as possible. They have an unfavorable effect on blood sugar levels and can really hamper your performance.

Protein Intake

Try to opt for quality, low-fat protein sources like skinless, white meat chicken and turkey, lean beef, eggs, tuna, flounder, sole and cod, skim and low fat milks, low-fat yogurt (not the "fruit on the bottom kind") and tofu. Limit your intake of high-fat cuts of beef and pork, hot dogs, chicken nuggets, fried chicken and pretty much all fast food, as much as possible. Proteins should make up anywhere between 20-25% of your total caloric intake.

Watch the Fat

Keep an eye on your fat intake. As a general rule, try to limit your intake of saturated fats, or any type of "hydrogenated oils" and "trans" fats. You can do this by cutting down on higher-fat cuts of beef and pork and all types of fast food. Also try to read as many nutrition labels as possible, as most clearly list the breakdown of both total fat, and saturated fats. Make sure that any food you choose has no more than 3 grams of fat per every 100 calories (i.e. in a 200 calorie food, 6 grams of fat is the limit), and that no more than about 1/3 of the total fat comes from saturated fat. So, that same 200 calorie food with 6 grams of total fat should have no more than 2 grams of saturated fat. Overall, fats should comprise anywhere from 15-20% of your total caloric intake.

Don't Forget Fruits and Vegetables

Eat as many fresh vegetables and fruits as you possibly can. Most kids fall way short of the recommended 5-9 daily servings of fruits and vegetables. They provide tons of vitamins and minerals, as well as much needed fiber.

Hydrate!

Proper hydration is absolutely key! You can't drink next to nothing for several days and think that jumbo Powerade you're swigging in the car on the way to the pool is going to do anything. Here's a breakdown of how much you should be drinking and when:

Overall water consumption for kids age 9 to 13 should be 2.0 to 2.5 liters per day, whereas 14-18 year-olds should strive for 2.5 to 3.5 liters, with girls falling near the lower end of the range, and boys at the higher end. Keep in mind, we're talking about water here, not juices, sports drinks, or soda. This should be your target for each and every day, with your fluid requirements increasing with athletic activity.

Sports drinks are really only necessary for activities lasting at least one hour in duration, but can otherwise be consumed in moderation if they encourage young athletes to drink. Watch the sugar content, though. When choosing a sports drink, look for one with a 6-8% carbohydrate concentration, or 50-80 calories per 8 ounces, with 120-170 milligrams of sodium.

Provided that you've adhered to the guidelines listed above, there are a couple of steps you can take the day of the meet to help make sure that you perform at your best. We'll bring those to you next week!