



Nutrition and Fitness: Fueling Your Body!

Several factors influence the amount of energy that athletes need to successfully train and compete. The type, intensity and frequency of training as well as the size, age and sex of the individual are major factors that dictate energy needs. For example, “weekend” athletes who engage in short bursts of activity will have different energy needs than serious marathon runners who are intensely training.

Carbohydrates, fats and protein all provide energy for the body. The primary functions of protein are growth, maintenance and repair of body tissue rather than as an energy source. Using protein for energy is inefficient, expensive and may lead to liver and kidney problems later in life. Carbohydrates and fats should be the energy sources to fuel the human body in all types of activity.

Carbohydrates

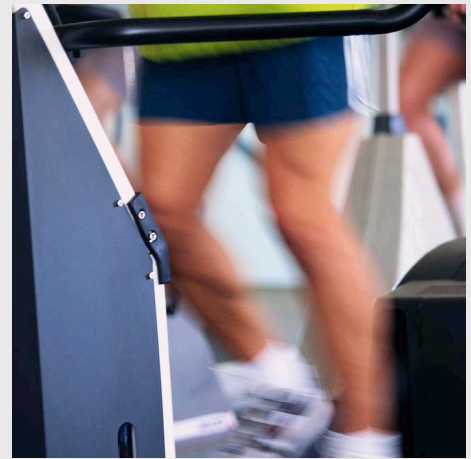
Complex carbohydrates such as starches should make up the majority of carbohydrate fuel. Examples of starchy foods are breads, cereals, and pastas, and starchy vegetables such as corn, potatoes, dried beans and peas. Fruits are also excellent sources of carbohydrates. It is important to eat a variety.

Carbohydrate Loading

Carbohydrate loading is the technique that may help endurance athletes such as marathon runners, swimmers or cyclists. The technique does not benefit athletes who are involved in training or competition for less than 90 continuous minutes. One week before the event, athletes increase carbohydrates to 50 - 55% of total calories. Three to four days before the event, carbohydrates are increased to 70% of total calories.

Carbohydrates During and After Athletic Events

When athletic events last more than 60 minutes, athletes benefit by eating carbohydrates during exercise. The extra fuel helps them stay competitive longer. Slightly sweetened beverages that contain less than 24 grams of carbohydrate per one cup (8oz) may be used. Following training or competing, it's important to eat complex carbohydrate-rich foods as soon as possible. After replenishment athletes can resume their normal high-carbohydrate training diet.



Facts about fats!

Fats, the other important fuel source, have more than twice as many calories as an equal weight of carbohydrates. Fats cannot be used exclusively as a fuel.

Since the body's fat storage is more than adequate to provide extra energy from fat, it is not necessary to get extra fat from your diet. In fact, a diet that is moderately low in fat (no more than 30 percent of total calories from fat) will not hinder performance and will promote an eating style that will be beneficial throughout life.

*Source: University of Nebraska Panhandle Research ,
Extension Cent, MayoClinic.com*

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