

Daily Nutrition

We're bombarded daily with different diets and new recommendations from nutrition experts around the globe. Wading through the mess of conflicting information can be a real headache. While I don't prescribe to any one particular diet, there are a number of commonalities with many sensible diets that I can provide you with.

Eat for fuel. As an athlete, we all need nutrients in order to perform at our best. For most triathletes, this means eating quite a bit. There are two components that determine your calorie needs. First is your base metabolism (BMR) – how many calories you need just to go through your daily life. This is determined by age (less as you grow older) and muscle mass (relative to total weight). It is also affected a bit by environment (living in hot climates raises it a bit). The second component is activity level. If you swim, bike, and run a lot, you will need a few more calories.

In general, endurance running, riding or swimming will burn between 500 to 1,000 calories per hour. (More or less depending on how fast you are going and how efficient your technique is). You can see a good calculator here: <http://www.webmd.com/diet/healthtool-calorie-counter-calculator>

Now that you have a good idea of how many calories you're burning per day, how do you meet those needs? Fast food and pre-packaged foods are not the answer! Fast food and pre-packaged, processed foods are typically high in fat and salt. While we require both, we don't need it in the type of quantities you find in these foods. Take a look at the salt content of your sliced sandwich meat some day. Kind of high, don't you think? Fast food and processed food have also been leached of essential vitamins and minerals. These foods are full of 'empty' calories.

What most sensible diets have in common is that fresh fruits, vegetables, and lean meats should comprise the backbone of your diet. Fruits and vegetables have most of the vitamins and minerals we need, are made of carbohydrate (which fuels our muscles) and fiber (which helps our waste removal system), while meat has the branch chain amino acids and protein required to rebuild muscle. Complex carbohydrates like whole wheat bread & pasta, or granola/muesli - low glycemic index (GI) foods - are good sources for regular carbs. Eggs are good sources of both carbohydrates and protein (you should remove some of the yolks due to high cholesterol if you eat a lot of eggs). Fruit smoothies with whey protein are easy to make and great post-workout meals.

Cheese and dairy should be used more sparingly. As much as I like a greasy New York style pizza, you are better off making your own at home with lots of veggies and going light on the cheese.

We also require fat in our diets to keep many of our organs functioning properly. One of the best sources for fat is nuts. Olive oil is also pretty good. Fat should be included in most meals in sparing amounts. Unsaturated fat is the healthy fat.

My current favorite food is spinach. You can use fresh spinach in eggs, on your sandwich, and in virtually any dinner. It is one of the most micro-nutrient dense foods. Popeye knew what he was doing.

I don't have time to cook

Many of us are pressed for time and want to get the most out of our day. Spending an hour or two in the kitchen doesn't quite appeal. But as an athlete looking to maximize your performance, you must

consider diet as important as your daily training. There are some easy ways to prepare healthy meals without burning a whole lot of time.

General:

- Get your shopping done on Saturday or Sunday.
- Chop up fresh fruits and veggies on Sunday for use in your meals throughout the week.
- Cook lean meats on Sunday for use throughout the week.
- Trade duties (cooking, cleaning, shopping) with your spouse/partner throughout the week.
- Hire help to cook, shop, and clean if you can afford and justify it.

Breakfast:

- A bowl of muesli or granola with some fruit and honey and low-fat yogurt or skim milk takes about five minutes to make.
- Scrambled eggs with chopped veggies takes seven minutes (I timed it this morning).
- If you don't have five or ten spare minutes in the morning then you need to work on your time management skills, plain and simple.

Lunch and dinner:

- Pack your lunch the day before (unless you work at home).
- Good side dishes include whole fruit, low-fat yogurt, nuts, and fruit smoothies/protein drinks.
- Avoid simple sugars like soda, candy, or ice cream.
- Avoid fried foods like French fries, chips, or fried chicken/fried fish.
- If you want to fry something, use extra virgin olive oil.

Can you see a theme here? If you prepare your meals on Sunday, you should be good through Wednesday. Defrosting or heating up food takes about five minutes. It is a small price to pay.

In the long run, you will thank yourself for getting in the habit of eating healthy and at home. It is cheaper and better for you than eating out.

Most importantly, as an athlete, a good diet will help you feel better and race faster.

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