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Nutrition tips for the holidays.

Holidays are a great time to spend time with friends and family. However, as an athlete it can be harder to stick to a healthy diet over the winter breaks. Overeating is common throughout the holidays and winter, but you don't have to let the temptation of seasonal comfort food derail your health in the cold months.[1,3]

This also poses a challenge for our younger athletes, managing their weight and improving athletic performance over the school breaks. Nutrition for sports doesn't take a special diet or supplementation to reach your peak performance level. It's all about working in the right foods that fit you and in the right amounts.

Teen athletes have different nutritional needs from energy expenditure to fulfill their sports performance and their growth. So, what happens if teen athletes don't eat enough? Not only is eating enough important to fuel their physical demands, it's also essential for overall growth and development. [1,3]

1. Follow the 80/20 rule.

Achieving good health doesn't require completely eliminating all of your favorite foods. However, it does require being more mindful about what and how much of something you're putting into your body. A good parameter for sticking to a healthy, well-balanced diet is choosing to nourish your body with healthier choices 80 percent of the time, while allowing yourself to enjoy some not-so-healthy foods 20 percent of the time. So, if you've filled your plate with lean proteins and green, fibrous vegetables, it's generally okay to enjoy a small serving of dessert.[3]

2. Eat a variety of foods.

As far as powering up your game for the long haul, it's important to eat healthy, well-balanced meals and snacks to get the nutrients your body needs. The caloric needs are important as well as vital vitamins and minerals.[1]

Calcium helps build strong bones that the athletes can depend on (low-fat milk, cheese, and yogurt).[2]

Iron brings oxygen to the muscles (lean meat, fish, poultry; leafy green vegetables; and iron-fortified cereals).[2]

Protein a building block of the body that makes up bone, muscles, cartilage enzymes etc. They're essential for growth and development, repair and build cells and tissue (fish, lean meats and poultry, eggs, dairy, nuts, soy, and peanut butter).[2]

Carbs are an excellent source of fuel. Restricting or not consuming enough carbs can make you feel tired and worn out, which can hurt your performance (fruits, vegetables, and whole grains)

Fats active muscles quickly burn through carbs and need fats for long-lasting energy. Choose healthier fats, such as unsaturated fat (vegetable oils, fish, and nuts and seeds). Fats tend to slow down digestion so stay away from these at least two hours prior to training.[2]

3. Eat slower and pause before helping yourself to seconds.

One of the best ways to reduce your risk of overeating is to take time to enjoy your food slowly. Sometimes we get so excited about certain foods, or we're so hungry that we inhale the food. When this happens, we eat so fast that our stomach hasn't yet signaled to the brain that we're full. As a result, we overeat by the time the brain has caught up. Before filling your plate with second helpings, let yourself sit for ten to fifteen minutes to consider whether you are still hungry.[3]

4. Keys to staying hydrated.

You shouldn't wait until you're thirsty to drink water. Instead, be proactive about getting your fluids in by drinking water first thing in the morning and throughout the day. Eating fruits and vegetables that are high in water content, such as watermelon and cucumbers, can also help you stay hydrated. Sports drinks are no better than water to help hydrate you but if you exercise for more than 60 to 90 minutes or in very hot weather, sports drinks may be a good option. In addition, don't use energy drinks or other caffeine-containing drinks for rehydration or a "pick me up." You could end up drinking large amounts of caffeine, which can increase heart rate and blood pressure. Too much caffeine can leave an athlete feeling anxious or jittery.[3]

5. Gameday eats.

Your nutritional fulfillment is crucial for performance on game day. This may lead to a boost in your performance, and you should focus on a diet rich in carbohydrates, moderate in protein, and low in fat.

Next gameday, try these out:

- Eat a meal 3 to 4 hours before activity. Include plenty of carbs and some protein but keep the fat low.
- If there is under three hours prior to start of practice or competition, try eating a lighter easy-to-digest carb meal as a substitute.
- Remember to refuel after the game (30 minutes after intense sessions and then rwo hours later) as well as 20 to 24 ounces of water or sports drink better prepared for game day. This may take some time, but everyone is different but figure out what works best for you.

6. Your sport needs you!

Each kind of activity has its own set of dietary rules. With each differing form of activity, your body requires different amounts of fuel to meet the energy demands. Endurance athletes need a higher caloric intake as well as carbohydrates and protein. High-intensity athletes need a high caloric intake as well and may benefit from more protein. It is important that the moderate individuals get adequate nutrition because under eating could cause lack of training adaptations and possibly hinder athletic performance.[4]

- **Endurance:** Vigorous, continuous activity for an hour or longer.

  –Distance running, distance swimming, tennis

- **High-intensity:** Short bursts of maximum or near maximum effort.

  –Weightlifting, sprinting, football, girls flag

- **Moderate-intensity:** Physical exertion is difficult enough to increase your heart rate and cause heavy breathing, but easy enough to sustain for more than 30 minutes.

  –Aerobics, basketball, soccer, volleyball

- **Low-intensity:** Everyday activities that involve movement of major muscle groups.

  –Baseball, pickleball, softball, bocce

References:

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