



SPORTS NUTRITION



Top 10 tips for sports nutrition

Reaching your athletic or sporting goals is not about strict dietary limitations or unrealistic training schedules. It is about optimising your intake to help you to train at your peak. Tweaking your pre-workout, during workout and post workout (or recovery) nutrition may be the difference between reaching your goals or hitting the wall. If you feel overwhelmed by all the conflicting nutrition and diet advice out there, you're not alone. It seems that for every 'expert' who tells you a certain food/ supplement is good for you- you'll find another saying exactly the opposite.

This course, created by Abby Courtenay, a Registered Dietitian, is designed to help you cut through the confusion and learn how to create an optimised sports orientated diet that works with you, not against you! Whether you are a professional athlete, or exercise more for personal health and enjoyment the Professional Diploma in Sports Nutrition sports is the right place to start.

The outcome of this course is to lay a strong foundation for your nutrition knowledge, so that you can build on more complex and interesting topics as we move through the modules.

1. Set realistic health goals

When you start a new eating plan, it is natural to want to be 'the best' ALL the time. This is normal and exciting. But beware of setting yourself unrealistic goals. In the long run, this will only serve to demotivate you. Try your best to set small, realistic goals that you can reach. The more small goals you reach, the more confident you will feel in tackling the bigger goals.

2. Plan your meals and always shop with a shopping list

The old saying 'never go to the supermarket hungry' could not be more true. When you shop on an empty stomach, you are much more likely to make impulsive buys (and unfortunately, these often tend to be healthier choices). Make it your mission to NEVER go to the shops without a shopping list. A good shopping list is created together with a menu plan for the week (remember, fail to plan and you plan to fail). Once again, be realistic when it comes to your menu planning. If you know you only have 20 minutes to prep and cook a meal, don't choose an elaborate recipe that you have never cooked before. Similarly, if you hate cooking, don't think that by just planning intricate homemade meals you will all of a sudden turn into Martha Stewart. As a bonus to this starter pack, I have included a 7 day printable version of a meal planner and shopping list that you can use to get you started!

3. Stick to a routine, eat your meals at similar times daily

Your body thrives off routine. As you will learn throughout this course, it is best to keep your meal times as regular as possible. Now I am not saying that everyone needs to eat a set number of meals (because this will depend on your personal



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preference and health status) i.e. 3 large meals per day or 6 smaller meals. What I am saying is that when you determine what suits you best, stick to it!

4. Time your nutrients wisely

Optimise your pre, during and post-workout meals to maximise performance. Carbohydrates are useful before, during and after working out and proteins are best placed during recovery. Fats should be distributed throughout the day and avoided directly before any type of endurance activity (to minimise gut discomfort). Check out module 1: lessons 2, 3 and 4 for detailed specifics on these intakes with practical examples.

5. Choose mainly whole, unrefined or minimally processed foods over highly processed counterparts

Whole foods are defined as: 'Food that has been processed or refined as little as possible and is free from additives or other artificial substances'. A whole food diet has been linked to numerous health benefits. Not only will you be consuming foods in their natural state, meaning that you get the maximum amount of nutrients available, but you will also be consuming less additives.

6. Use sports foods & supplements with purpose

Sports supplements and sports foods should be used sparingly and with purpose. They should not replace whole foods regularly and should only be used where the evidence shows more benefit than risk. Sports supplements and foods are seldomly regulated and because of this may contain banned substances (thus professional athletes should avoid/ use with caution).

7. Eat fruits and vegetables everyday

Fruits and vegetables are a valuable source of vitamins, minerals and fibre. Multiple studies have shown that a diet high in fruits and vegetables is conducive to good health and can help prevent chronic disease and early death. These foods also contain special nutrients called phytonutrients (or plant nutrients) that give us health benefits over and above those that we would expect. Each group of phytonutrients has variety of functions and varying effects on our health.

8. Include plant based proteins often

Plant based proteins include (but are not limited to) legumes like beans, lentils and chickpeas, pseudo cereals like quinoa and soya protein foods. Plants based proteins are usually a source of protein, fibre as well as various vitamins and minerals. Because of this they are considered to be very nutritious and filling. They are wonderful additions to any diet and have many health promoting characteristics.

9. Choose lean proteins

When choosing animal based proteins (like poultry, meat and dairy) aim to choose lean alternatives. Fat is a very important part of the diet, but we should strive to replace animal fats in the diet with plant fats (like olive oil, avocado's, nuts, seeds etc.)



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10. Drink mainly water and limit the amount of sweetener (nutritive or non-nutritive) that you use on a daily basis.

Many people do not drink enough water but instead drink sugar sweetened beverages, tea or coffee. Many of these alternative drinks contain significant amounts of sugar which can contribute to unwanted weight gain and dental caries. If you don't drink enough water, you may become dehydrated and suffer symptoms like fatigue, irritability, loss of concentration and constipation. These are frustrating symptoms to have and can easily be remedied by drinking more water. Your water requirements vary and depend on a variety of factors like age, weight, activity levels and the environmental condition. This being said, for most healthy people, it is unlikely that you will overconsume water and much more likely that you will under consume. If in doubt, drink a little bit more rather than less.

Resources:

American Dietetic Association: <https://www.eatright.org/>

Association for Dietetics in South Africa: <http://adsa.org.za/>

British Dietetic Association: <https://www.bda.uk.com/>

Dietetic Association of Australia: <https://daa.asn.au/>

Dietitians of Canada: <https://www.dietitians.ca/>

Indian Dietetic Association: <http://idaindia.com/>

Irish Dietetic Association: <https://www.indi.ie/>