Nutrition Matters

HEALTHY EATING FOR AN ACTIVE LIFESTYLE

Are you looking for a nutrition game plan to support your various physical activities? If so, the game plan is for you to nourish yourself with wholesome foods that will fuel your body and support your overall health. Answer the following questions to see how you are doing.

1. **Do you take protein supplements to increase muscle mass?**
   - ❑ **Yes**
   - ❑ **No**

If you answered "no" to this question you know that the protein requirements of the average physically active person can easily be obtained from everyday foods. If you are eating a varied diet and eating enough Calories to maintain your weight, then you will also be meeting your protein needs.

Many athletes eat four to five times more protein than they require. The excess protein must be broken down and the by-products eliminated from the body in urine.

Handling these wastes puts extra stress on the liver and kidneys, increases the need to urinate, and may cause dehydration. Also, extra energy from protein that the body doesn't need will be stored as fat.

2. **When active, do you drink enough water so that you produce your usual amount of urine and it is pale coloured?**
   - ❑ **Yes**
   - ❑ **No**

Hopefully you answered "yes" to this question. Water is an extremely important nutrient for an athlete. During physical activity a lot of water is lost as sweat. This results in a reduction of blood volume. A drop in blood volume leads to a decrease in cardiovascular efficiency and an increase in internal body temperature.

You need more uncaffeinated fluids if you have small amounts of dark urine. Vitamin supplements may also darken your urine. Remember to drink before, during, and after exercise. You can't rely on feeling thirsty to know how much to drink. When it's hot, drink a little more, but not so much that you feel uncomfortable.

3. Do you enjoy regular snacking?

- ❑ **Yes**
- ❑ **No**

Let's hope you answered "yes" to this question. You need to fuel your active lifestyle with a variety of foods from the four foods groups in *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*. Try whole wheat crackers and cheese, trail mix, dried fruit, juice, dry cereals, fruits, granola bars, or yogourt.

4. Do you take megadoses of vitamins for increased energy?

- ❑ **Yes**
- ❑ **No**

If you answered "no" to this question you know that energy does not come from vitamins. Energy comes from carbohydrate, fat and protein. Although some vitamins help the body to use energy, these vitamins are easily obtained from a high carbohydrate diet that includes a variety of foods from the four food groups. Extra vitamins from a pill or tablet will not improve your physical performance or provide any other added benefit.

5. Do you rely only on sports drinks for fluid replacement?

- ❑ **Yes**
- ❑ **No**

Sports drinks are not necessary for all active people so you should have answered "no" to this question. Water is the ideal fluid replacement for most active people. Carry a water bottle and drink frequently to prevent dehydration.

For athletes who exercise vigorously for longer than an hour, a sports drink may be a good choice. So, if you're a long-distance runner, or bicyclist, or if you're involved in other endurance events, try a sports drink, but remember to drink plenty of water also!

6. Do you use *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* to help direct your food choices?

- ❑ **Yes**
- ❑ **No**

Hopefully you answered "yes" to this question. *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* is your starting point for planning your healthy eating plan. The *Food Guide* provides a range of daily serving recommendations for each of the four food groups: Grain Products, Vegetables & Fruit, Milk Products, and Meat & Alternatives. Because you will need more food after vigorous exercise, you can choose the higher number of recommended servings. Remember to emphasize whole grains, vegetables and fruits; they will provide you with the carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals that will keep you going!

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