Health-Full Eating and Nutrition

What's Fueling Your Workout?

Your body is the vehicle that keeps you moving throughout the day and food is the fuel that powers your engine. In order to be efficient, you must fuel your body with the right foods at the right times. This is especially important when you exhaust your engine during a workout.

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) recommends consuming adequate food and fluid "before, during, and after exercise to help maintain blood glucose concentration during exercise, maximize exercise performance, and improve recovery time." They also suggest that you remain "well hydrated before exercise and drink enough fluid during and after exercise to balance fluid losses."

Pre-Workout

Fueling your body with the energy it needs to workout is important so you don't "drive on empty." You need enough energy to sustain the length and intensity of your workout. Without this energy, you won't be able to maximize your workout and you'll limit your ability to burn calories. Ideally, two to four hours before working out, you should eat a meal that is rich in complex carbohydrates (such as brown rice, whole-grain toast, fruits and vegetables), moderate in lean

protein (like chicken or low-fat yogurt) and includes plenty of hydrating fluids. For meals eaten closer to your workouts, choose simple carbs that are easy to digest and some protein (think a piece of fruit and nut butter or a protein granola bar), to avoid stomach discomfort.

Pre-Workout Fuel

During Your Workout

Keep your body hydrated during your workout with small, frequent sips of water. The ACSM recommends drinking 16-20 ounces of water at least four hours before exercise and 8-12 ounces of water 10-15 minutes before exercise.

Post-Workout

You should ideally eat within 45 minutes after your workout, keeping in mind the three R's of recovery: replenish, rebuild and rehydrate.

Post-Workout Fuel
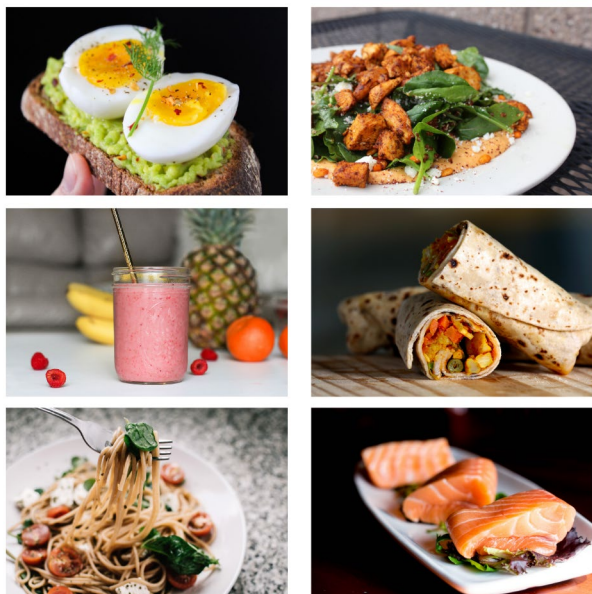
Replenish your muscles with carbohydrates (their main source of fuel) to replace what was burned off during exercise. Within 20-60 minutes after your workout, your muscles can store carbohydrates and protein as energy. Simple carbohydrates are ideal immediately post-workout because they break down quickly (for example, potatoes, fruit, pasta and low-fat dairy).

Rebuild your muscles with protein. Exercise causes muscle breakdown and high-quality protein, like milk, yogurt, eggs, cheese and lean meats can help rebuild and repair muscle fibers. Whey protein is a good choice after a workout as your body can digest it quickly and it contains a high content of leucine, an amino acid that has been shown to help build and repair muscles after a workout. Whey protein can be found in protein bars or powders for a quick post-workout fix if you're running low on time.

Rehydrate with fluid and electrolytes you sweat out during exercise (such as water and low-calorie electrolyte drinks). Rehydrating can help with recovery and performance, especially if your next workout is within 24 hours.

Summary

Your pre- and post-workout nutrition is arguably just as important as your workout itself. Use these tips to fuel your body with sustainable energy for both exercise and recovery.

References:

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From Corporate Fitness Works Team Leader: Brittany Halpin