

Anyone concerned with living a healthy lifestyle has undoubtedly searched for quality nutrition tips at some point. Certainly it is not hard to find these days, as newscasts, magazines, television shows and the internet offer countless sources of ‘expert’ information.

Being in the role of having to pass along quality nutrition advice to many young athletes over the years, I am extremely selective about whose knowledge to share. Questions about supplements, meal timing, protein requirements, and so on are common among those looking to perform at their absolute best. What you say to these eager and impressionable athletes can have a profound effect on the food choices they make for years to come. Needless to say, it is critical that you know what you’re talking about before you potentially lead them down the wrong road.

Anyone who has already read the best-selling *Nancy Clark’s Sports Nutrition Guidebook* knows it is quite possibly the best resource for practical nutrition advice you can find anywhere. It gives you the simple and straightforward truth about:

- ✓ The importance of breakfast
- ✓ Calorie, protein, carbohydrate, fat, and hydration requirements
- ✓ Meal timing
- ✓ Safely adding lean muscle
- ✓ Safely getting leaner
- ✓ Supplements
- ✓ Age-specific nutrition needs
- ✓ And many more critical dietary topics.

As if that weren’t enough, there are also dozens of recipes that are easy to follow and taste great. There is even a recipe in there for how to create your own sports drink, which can save you literally hundreds of dollars over time.

It is a great honor to have Nancy Clark share some of her strategies with us, and I hope you discover some great tips for improving your dietary habits in the articles below. For those who would like to learn more about healthy eating from Nancy Clark, please check out her website:

[www.nancyclarkrd.com](http://www.nancyclarkrd.com)

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## Strategies to Eat Better

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More often than not, athletes ask me “What is a well balanced diet? What should I be eating to help me perform at my best?” They feel overwhelmed by the seemingly endless list of nutrition don'ts. Don't eat white sugar, white bread, processed foods, fast foods, french fries, soda, salt, trans fats, butter, eggs, red meat... You've heard it all, I'm sure.

If you want to eat better but don't know where to start, here's a nutrition strategy that can help you fuel your body with a well balanced sports diet. The suggestions guide you towards an eating style that's simple and practical, yet can effectively help you eat well to perform well, despite today's bewildering food environment.

- **Eat at least three kinds of nutrient-dense food at each meal.** Don't eat just one food per meal, such as a bagel for breakfast. Add two more foods: peanut butter and lowfat milk. Don't choose just a salad for lunch. Add grilled chicken and a crusty whole grain roll. For dinner, enjoy pasta with tomato sauce and ground turkey. Two-thirds of the meal should be whole grains, vegetables, and fruits, and one-third lowfat meats, dairy, beans or other protein-rich foods.

Too many athletes eat a repetitive menu with the same 10 to 15 foods each week. Repetitive eating keeps life simple, minimizes decisions, and simplifies shopping, but it can result in an inadequate diet and chronic fatigue. The more different foods you eat, the more different types of vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients you consume. A good target is 35 different foods per week. Start counting!

- **Eat “closer to the earth” by choosing more foods in their natural state.** For instance, choose oranges rather than orange juice; orange juice rather than sports drink; whole-wheat bread rather than white bread; baked potatoes rather than french fries. Foods in their natural (or lightly processed) state offer more nutritional value and less sodium, trans fat, and other health-eroding ingredients. You'll find these foods along the perimeter of the grocery store: fresh produce, lean meats, lowfat dairy, whole grain breads. If possible, choose locally grown foods that support your local farmer and require less fuel for transportation to the market.

- **Fuel your body on a regular schedule, eating even-sized meals every four hours.** For example, a reducing diet (non-dieters need another 100-200 calories per meal) might be:

Breakfast (7-8:00 am): 500 calories (cereal + milk + banana)  
Lunch (11-noon): 500 calories (sandwich + milk)  
Lunch #2 (3-4:00): 400-500 calories (yogurt + granola + nuts)  
Dinner (7-8:00 pm): 500-600 cals (chicken + potato + greens)

This differs from the standard pattern of skimpy 200 to 300 calorie breakfasts and lunches that get followed by too many calories of sugary snacks and super-sized dinners.

Depending on your body size, each meal should be the equivalent of two to three pieces of pizza; that's about 500 to 750 calories (or 2,000 to 3,000 calories per day). Think about having four “food buckets” that you fill with 500 to 750 calories from at least kinds of foods every four hours. Even if you want to lose weight, you can (and should) target 500 calories at breakfast, lunch #1 and lunch #2. Those meals will ruin your evening appetite, so you'll be able to “diet” at dinner by eating smaller portions. (Note: Most active people can lose weight on 2,000 cal, believe it or not!)

Whatever you do, try to stop eating in a “crescendo” (with meals getting progressively bigger as the day evolves). Your better bet is to eat on a time-line and consume 3/4 of your calories in the active part of your day; eat less at the end of the day. One runner took this advice and started eating his dinner foods for lunch, a sandwich for lunch #2 (instead of snacking on cookies) and then had soup and a bagel for dinner. He enjoyed far more energy during the day, was able to train harder in the afternoon, and significantly improved his race times.

• **Honor hunger. Eat when you are hungry, and then stop eating when you feel content.** Hunger is simply a request for fuel; your body is telling you it burned off what you gave it and needs a refill. To disregard hunger is abusive. Just as you would not withhold food from a hungry infant, you should not withhold food from your hungry body. If you do, you will start to crave sweets (a physiological response to calorie deprivation) and end up eating “junk”.

While counting calories is one way to educate yourself how to fill each 500-calorie “bucket” (for calorie information, use food labels, [www.fitday.com](http://www.fitday.com), and [www.calorieking.com/foods](http://www.calorieking.com/foods)), you can more simply pay attention to your body's signals. Keep checking in with yourself, “Is my body content? Or, does my body need this fuel?” If confronted with large portions that would leave you feeling stuffed, consider letting the excess food go to waste, not to “waist.”

• **Think moderation.** Rather than categorize a food as being good or bad for your health, think about moderation, and aim for a diet that offers 85 to 90 percent quality foods and 10 to 15 percent foods with fewer nutritional merits. Enjoy a foundation of healthful foods, but don't deprive yourself of enjoyable foods. This way, even soda pop and chips, if desired, can fit into a nourishing food plan. You just need to balance the “junk” with healthier choices throughout the rest of the day. That is, you can compensate for an occasional greasy sausage and biscuit breakfast by selecting a low-fat turkey sandwich lunch and a grilled fish dinner.

• **Take mealtimes seriously.** If you can find the time to train hard, you can also find the time to fuel right. In fact, competitive athletes who don't show up for meals might as well not show up for training. You'll lose your edge with hit or miss fueling, but you'll always win with good nutrition!

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## 2009 Sports Nutrition Guidelines

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Hot off the press from three prominent nutrition and exercise associations—the American Dietetic Association, American College of Sports Medicine, and Dietitians of Canada—is the *2009 Joint Position Stand on Nutrition for Athletic Performance*. While there is little earth-shattering news in this comprehensive document (available on [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org); on the left side of the screen, click on *Position stands*), the authors comprehensively reviewed the research to determine which sports nutrition practices effectively enhance performance. Here are a few key points, and the reminder that what and when you eat powerfully impacts how well you can perform. I hope this information entices you to “think again” if nutrition is your missing link.

- Don't weigh yourself daily! What you weigh and how much body fat you have should not be the sole criterion for judging how well you are able to perform in sports. That is, don't think that if you get to XX% body fat, you will run faster. For one, all techniques to measure body fat have inherent errors. (Even BodPod can underestimate percent fat by 2 to 3%.) Two, optimal body fat levels depend on genetics and what is optimal for your unique body. Pay more attention to how you feel and perform than to a number on the scale.
- Protein recommendations for both endurance and strength-trained athletes range from 0.5 to 0.8 grams per pound (1.2-1.7 g/kg) body weight. For a 150 lb. athlete, this comes to about 75 to 120 g protein per day, an amount most athletes easily consume through their standard diet without the use of protein supplements or amino acid supplements. Vegetarian athletes should target 10% more, because some plant proteins (not soy but legumes) are less well digested than animal proteins.

If you are just starting a weight-lifting program, you'll want to target the higher protein amount. Once you have built-up your muscles, the lower end of the range is fine.

- Athletes in power sports need to pay attention to carbohydrates, and not just protein. That's because strength training depletes muscle glycogen stores. You can deplete about

25% to 35% of total muscle glycogen stores during a single 30-second bout of resistance exercise.

- Athletes who eat enough calories to support their athletic performance are unlikely to need vitamin supplements. But athletes who severely limit their food intake to lose weight (such as wrestlers, lightweight rowers, gymnasts), eliminate a food group (such as dairy, if they are lactose intolerant), or train indoors and get very little sunlight (skaters, gymnasts, swimmers) may require supplements.
- If you are vegetarian, a blood donor, and or a woman with heavy menstrual periods, you should pay special attention to your iron intake. If you consume too little iron, you can easily become deficient and be unable to exercise energetically due to anemia. Because reversing iron deficiency can take 3 to 6 months, your best bet is to prevent anemia by regularly eating iron-rich foods (lean beef, chicken thighs, enriched breakfast cereals such as Wheaties and Total) and including in each meal a source of vitamin C (fruits, vegetables).
- Eating before hard exercise, as opposed to exercising in a fasted state, has been shown to improve performance. If you choose to not eat before a hard workout, at least consume a sports drink (or some source of energy) during exercise.
- When you exercise hard for more than one hour, target 30 to 60 grams (120 to 240 calories) of carbohydrate per hour to maintain normal blood glucose levels and enhance your stamina and enjoyment of exercise. Fueling during exercise is especially important if you have not eaten a pre-exercise snack. Popular choices include gummi candy, jelly beans, dried fruits, as well as gels and sports drinks. More research is needed to determine if choosing a sports drink with protein will enhance endurance performance.
- For optimal recovery, an athlete who weighs about 150 pounds should target 300 to 400 calories of carbs within a half-hour after finishing a hard workout. More precisely, target 0.5-0.7 g carb/lb (1.0-1.5 g carb/kg). You then want to repeat that dose every 2 hours for the next four to six hours. For example, if you have done a rigorous, exhaustive morning workout and need to do another session that afternoon, you could enjoy a large banana and a vanilla yogurt as soon as tolerable post-exercise; then, two hours later, a pasta-based meal; and then, another two hours later, another snack, such as pretzels and orange juice.
- Whether or not you urgently need to refuel depends on when you will next be exercising. While a triathlete who runs for 90 minutes in the morning needs to rapidly refuel for a 3-hour cycling workout in the afternoon, the fitness exerciser who works out every other day has little need to obsess about refueling.
- Including a little protein in the recovery meals and snacks enhances muscle repair and growth. Popular carb+protein combinations include chocolate milk, yogurt, cereal+milk, pita+hummus, beans+rice, pasta+meat sauce.

•Muscle cramps are associated with dehydration, electrolyte deficits, and fatigue. Cramps are most common in athletes who sweat profusely and are “salty sweaters.” They need more sodium than the standard recommendation of 2,400 mg/day. Losing about 2 pounds of sweat during a workout equates to losing about 1,000 mg sodium. (Note: 8 ounces of sport drink may offer only 110 mg sodium.) Salty sweaters (as observed by a salty crust on the skin of some athletes) lose even more sodium. If that’s your case, don’t hesitate to consume salt before, during and after extended exercise. For example, enjoy broth, pretzels, cheese & crackers, pickles and other sodium-rich foods. The majority of active people can easily replace sweat losses via a normal intake of food and fluids.

Final words of advice: If you can make time to train, you can also make time to eat well and get the most out of your training. Optimal sports performance starts with good nutrition!

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## Body Image and Athletes

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Question: What are two things dogs and athletes have in common?

Answer: One, both dogs and athletes love to exercise. Two, they both come in different sizes and shapes.

Question: What is one thing dogs and athletes do NOT have in common?

Answer: Dogs are content with their natural physiques, while too many athletes try very hard to change the way they look. These athletes might be better off being like dogs. That is, does that bulky St. Bernard yearn to look like a lanky Greyhound? Heavens, no! Does the barrel-chested Labrador want to look like a sleek Setter? Doubtful. Each dog is very proud to represent his breed. Wouldn’t life be easier if each active person could be just as proud of his or her “breed”?

As a sports dietitian, I spend too many hours helping my clients find peace with their bodies. Most of these active people take the outside-in approach. They think if they change their body from the outside by losing undesired body fat or by adding some muscular bulk, they will be happier on the inside. Unfortunately, not true!

No weight will ever be good enough to do the enormous job of creating happiness. This story, told to me by a cyclist, proves that point: *“I once weighed 124 pounds and was unhappy with that weight. I started exercising and dieting rigidly. I lost to 99 pounds but I still wasn't happy. I ended up binge-eating; I gained to 160 pounds, where I was miserable. I sought help from a counselor, stopped eating emotionally, and with time, got my weight back to 124—and I felt happy there! Why couldn't I have been happy at 124 pounds in the first place? Because happiness has nothing to do with weight...”*

Granted, some people do have excess body fat they can appropriately lose to be healthier as a person and lighter as an athlete. They can rightfully feel pleased when they accomplish the goal of attaining an appropriate weight. But other athletes just think they have excess fat to lose; they have distorted body images. A survey of 425 collegiate female athletes reports the women wanted to lose 5 pounds, on average. (1) Another survey of the top women runners in the country found the same results. (2) Even elite athletes wistfully believe they will perform better if they are leaner. Unfortunately, the struggle to attain that “perfect weight” can cost them their health and happiness. Restrictive diets with inadequate protein, iron, zinc, calcium and a myriad of other health-protective nutrients—to say nothing of carbs for fuel—often contribute to injuries and poorer performance.

So what can you do if you are discontent with your body? First of all, you should get your body fat measured to determine if you actually have excess fat to lose. Data can be helpful. (Find a local sports dietitian to measure your body fat via the referral network at [SCANdpg.org](http://SCANdpg.org).) You may discover you have less body fat than expected!

## Feeling fat

It's easy to understand why so many athletes have distorted body images. When you put on skimpy running shorts that expose your “flabby things”, or a bathing suit that shows every bump and bulge, you can very easily “feel fat.” Sound familiar?

One solution to the “I feel fat syndrome” is to remember “fat” is not a feeling. That is, you don't feel “blond hair” or “freckled.” You also do not feel “fat.” Yes, you may be feeling uncomfortable with your body. But you are really feeling imperfect, inadequate, insecure, anxious—and any number of other feelings that get described as “feeling fat.”

I encourage you to explore those real feelings, and figure out where you got the message that something is wrong with your body. The media is a good start, but it could also be a parent who lovingly said at a tender age “That outfit looks nice, honey, but if only you'd lose a few pounds...” What you hear is “I'm not good enough” and this can create a downward spiral of self-esteem. Weight issues are rarely about weight. They tend to be about feeling inadequate and imperfect.

## What to do

So how can a discontent athlete feel better about his or her body? One tactic is to stop comparing yourself to your peers. *To compare is to despair*. Rather, pretend you live on an island where your body is “good enough” the way it is. (You are unlikely to ever have a “perfect” body, so the second best option is to enjoy a body that is “good enough.”) If you step off your island and start comparing yourself to your peers, please notice: Do you end up being too fat, too slow, too ugly, too dumb? Do you ever let yourself rise to the top and be better than others? Doubtful. You are better off staying on your island, and calling yourself a *Gorgeous Goddess* or *Handsome Hulk*. With time and practice, you can change the way you see yourself and come to believe perhaps you are, indeed, good enough the way you are!

Granted, changing the way you feel about your body is a complex process. The following resources can help you in this journey to find peace with your body:

[www.nourishingconnections.com](http://www.nourishingconnections.com) (free e-newsletter)

[www.findingbalance.com](http://www.findingbalance.com) (has videos about resolving weight issues)

[www.adiosBarbie.com](http://www.adiosBarbie.com) (offers resources, and insights into the media)

For a plethora of books, visit the online bookshelf at [www.gurze.com](http://www.gurze.com). Some of my favorites include *The Body Image Workbook* and *The Don't Diet, Live-It Workbook*.

Life is more enjoyable when you can love your body and appreciate it for all it does and stop hating it for what it is not. When the drive for thinness comes with a high price, that price may not be worth the cost.

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# Alcohol, Athletes & Pressure to Drink

*Copyright: Nancy Clark MS RD CSSD April 2008*

Ask any coach or college athletic director, and you'll hear concern about alcohol and athletes. Rightfully so. Alcohol and athletics is a dangerous duo, associated with negative consequences including hangovers, nausea and vomiting, poor grades in school, fights, arguments, memory loss, driving under the influence, and trouble with the law—to say nothing of injuries. Yet, tailgating before football games, quenching thirst at the pub after a team workout, and celebrating victories with champagne is perceived as the norm.

College athletes are more likely to drink than non-athletes. Serious recreational runners drink more than their sedentary counterparts. Unfortunately, alcohol is a highly addictive substance and is the most abused drug in the United States, more so than steroids. Prolonged drinking can damage the liver, heart, and brain, and result in cirrhosis, pancreatitis, irregular heart beats, stroke, and malnutrition. More oral cancer is seen among those who are just moderate drinkers as compared to abstainers.

## **What can be done about this problem?**

To address the problem of alcohol abuse among student-athletes, many college campuses are educating students about social norms—the beliefs about what is normal and expected in social situations. For example, despite popular belief, “everyone” does not drink nor do “most students” get drunk all the time.

A 1999 survey at Southern Methodist University asked these four questions to students on a Friday about alcohol use on the previous night:

Did you drink last night?

Did you get drunk last night?

What percentage of SMU students do you think drank last night?

What percentage of SMU students do you think got drunk last night?

The answers showed major misperceptions about alcohol norms:

-Only 20% of students surveyed reported drinking the previous night, yet they believed that over half drank.

-Only 8% reported getting drunk, yet they believed at least one-third got drunk.

-Of students who drank, most reported consuming only a few drinks per week. Yet they believed most students were drinking 10 to 15 drinks per week.

-35% reported abstaining from alcohol, but very few believed that many of their peers were non-drinkers.

([http://smu.edu/healthcenter/alchooleducation/adp\\_socialnorms.asp](http://smu.edu/healthcenter/alchooleducation/adp_socialnorms.asp).)

With ongoing social norm education, students will actually change their drinking practices. For example, a three-year social-norm education program targeted Division III athletes in a NY State college. It contributed to a 30% drop in both excessive alcohol consumption and the negative consequences of drinking. Among student-athletes with the highest exposure to the program, personal alcohol misuse dropped 50%. (1) Given that athletes are often role models, this change can have a positive impact on the entire campus and potentially (eventually) our entire sports society.

### **Minimizing negative consequences**

If you are among the athletes who chooses to drink large amounts of alcohol, take note:

- Alcohol is a depressant. Apart from killing pain, it offers no edge for athletes. You can't be sharp, quick, and drunk. Pre-competition alcohol has a deleterious effect on reaction time, accuracy, balance, eye-hand coordination and endurance. It will not help you exercise faster, stronger, longer.
- Late night partying that contributes to sleep deprivation before the next morning's event hurts performance.
- Alcohol is a poor source of carbohydrates. You can get loaded with beer, but your muscles will not get carbo-loaded. A 12-ounce can of beer has only 14 grams of carbs, as compared to 40 grams in a can of soft drink. Eat pretzels, thick-crust pizza or other carbs along with the beer.
- Alcohol on an empty stomach can quickly lead to a drunken stupor. Be wise; enjoy the natural high of exercise rather than get brought down by a few post-exercise beers.
- Alcohol has a diuretic effect--the more you drink, the more fluids you lose. This is bad for recovery and the next exercise bout. While low-alcohol beer allows for proper rehydration, regular beer sends athletes running to the bathroom. One study showed that athletes who drank beer eliminated about 16 ounces more urine (over the course of 4 hours) than those who drink low-alcohol (2%) beer or alcohol-free beer. (2)
- Your liver breaks down alcohol at a fixed rate (~1 can beer or 4 ounces wine per hour). Exercise does not hasten the process, nor does coffee. Caffeine just makes you a wide-awake drunk.
- Drinks that contain congeners—whiskey, cognac, and red wine—are more likely to cause hangovers than other alcoholic beverages. The best hangover remedy is to not drink

excessively in the first place. But if you have a hangover, drink a salted beverage with carbs, such as Gatorade or brothy chicken noodle soup.

- The calories in alcohol are easily fattening. People who drink moderately tend to consume alcohol calories on top of their regular caloric intake. These excess calories promote body fat accumulation.
- Alcohol stimulates the appetite, making it harder to feel full. If you are trying to maintain a lean machine, abstaining is preferable to imbibing.

### **The good news**

Alcohol in moderation can have health benefits. Red wine, for example, contains health-protective phytochemicals that may reduce the risk of heart disease. What's "moderation"?—two drinks per day for men, and one for women. And have at least one glass of non-alcoholic beverage for every drink...

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