[IMAGE]

Optimize Your Workouts With the Power of Nutrition

By Ryan Blair

workout - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Going to the gym and engaging in a vigorous workout is a quick way to boost your mood and increase endorphins that make you feel good and positive about the day, no matter what challenges you may be facing. It only makes sense that we want to make the most out of the time we spend at the gym. But whether you are a die-hard athlete or just like to take a brisk walk after dinner, it's important to take steps to eat the right foods to optimize your workout. Here's how.

Keep It Simple

Many of us have become conditioned to eat three large meals per day. However, a better way to optimize your workouts through nutrition is to eat several smaller snacks throughout the day. For starters, this method prevents you from getting hungry in between meals, which often results in overeating. Also consider the fact that when you eat, blood is diverted from the muscles in order to aid in digestion. Therefore, smaller snacks eaten before a workout can help you better utilize your blood flow to get the most out of time spent in the gym.

snacks - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Some healthful snacks to incorporate during the day include:

- Cottage cheese
- Yogurt
- Fruit
- Nuts
- Sliced chicken or turkey

Don't Forget Hydration

In a society filled with advertisements, it can seem harmless to consume beverages such as soft drinks and juices. However, they are chock-full of sugars and other additives that take away from your efforts to optimize your workouts. It's estimated that nearly half of Americans fail to consume a proper amount of

water, and it's suggested that the average person drink around eight glasses per day.

hydration - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark This may seem excessive; however, it can actually lead to weight loss. This is because when the body fails to get the amount of hydration it needs, it stores water for reserve. When the proper amount is introduced, the body is able to release the stored water and help you better achieve your fitness goals.

Pack the Protein

It's the goal of many people to gain muscle mass in order to look their best. While this does involve an active exercise regimen, it's important to understand the process of the development of new muscle. When you work out, it causes damage to the muscles, which is what leads to much of the soreness you experience the day following a vigorous workout. In order to encourage the development of lean muscle, protein is a crucial nutrient that should be actively added into your diet.

protein - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark In a process known as protein synthesis, the body stores protein to be used not only to develop muscles, but also to perform other functions such as the production of hormones and the regulation of the body's various tissues and organs. Since you're constantly using protein, it's crucial that you keep your reserves filled so you are prepared when you need them most.

Just some of the best post-workout protein you should consider incorporating into your diet include:

- Lean meat
- Whey, found in dairy products or in supplement form
- Casein, also found in milk
- Pea protein
- Nuts and legumes

Cook Ahead of Time

Finding healthful foods to consume is often only half the battle. Our days can get busy and it can be difficult to find the time for preparation. This puts you in danger of indulging on some of the various fast foods lurking around every corner you turn.

When you have a few hours to spare on the weekend, this provides a great time to cook in advance. You can prepare large portions of healthful meals that can be frozen and saved for a later time. This way, you'll have quick and easy access to a healthful meal when you need it most.

A few convenient foods that are perfect for this strategy include:

- Soups
- Chili
- Chicken
- Steamed veggies
- Quinoa
- Brown rice

You Are What You Eat

Even if you spend 20 hours per week at the gym, your time is spent in vain if you don't consider what you're putting into your body. Consider that running on a treadmill at a pace of 10 minutes per mile for 45 minutes burns 500 calories. Those calories can quickly be gained back by eating just two slices of a 14-inch, regular-crust pepperoni pizza. You are what you eat, and, when you understand how to relate your nutrition to workouts, you can be on your way to achieving an optimal level of health and vitality.

Ryan Blair has nearly 10 years of experience as a personal trainer, which has given him a vast amount of knowledge and expertise within the health, fitness and nutrition space. His love of writing, combined with his passion for helping others, motivates him to provide helpful and challenging information. He loves interacting with his readers and is dedicated to helping them live healthier, more fulfilling lives.

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