

You Are What You Eat

You may be working hard in practice, but are you supplementing your training with proper nutrition? Test your nutrition I.Q. by deciding whether the following statements are true or false and comparing with the answers below.

1. Fruit is an excellent source of carbohydrate. True / False
2. Generally speaking, the more colorful and varied your fruit and vegetable platter, the healthier it is. True / False
3. It's best to wait about an hour after a tough practice to fuel your body with carbohydrates and protein. True / False
4. It's important to stay hydrated because it can directly affect athletic performance. True / False
5. If you become very dehydrated, your body may require two to four hours to replace fluid loss. True / False
6. Skipping breakfast will keep your energy levels stable throughout the day. True / False
7. The primary fuel source for swimmers is protein. True / False
8. Eating early and often throughout the day helps you avoid the blood sugar highs and lows (high energy, then sleepiness). True / False

Answers

1. True. Fruit provides carbohydrate in the form of natural sugars (versus refined sugar). Fruit is a tasty, nutritious and easy snack, especially for swimmers on the go.
2. True. The bright colors of fruits and vegetables indicate high levels of vitamins, minerals and anti-oxidants. Having a variety of nutrient-rich fruits and vegetables all bring something different to the table. Good examples include apples, pineapples, berries, bananas, oranges, kiwi, melons, grapes, mangoes, papayas, apricots, peppers, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, avocados, zucchini, squash, corn, peas, beans and tomatoes.
3. False. Try to eat a carbohydrate and protein snack within the first 30 minutes after practice. The sooner, the better. This will replenish your body's depleted blood sugar levels and glycogen stores, and repair muscle tissue. If you have trouble eating solid food after a hard workout, try liquid foods such as chocolate milk or a fruit smoothie. Then aim for eating a substantial meal within two hours after practice to maximize recovery.
4. True. Drinking early and often (every 15 minutes during practice) keeps you hydrated and provides your body with fuel. Without fluids, you decrease your work capacity, which can have a negative impact on exercise performance.

5. False. It could take up to 24 to 48 hours to totally replace fluid loss after dehydration sets in. Drink frequently throughout the day. Clear to pale yellow urine is a good indicator that you are staying hydrated. If you don't want water, fruit juices and milk shakes are great nutrition choices, more so than sports drinks. Orange juice has 20 grams more potassium than Gatorade.
6. False. Make it a habit to eat a hearty breakfast every morning. You'll eat less junk food later in the day, and it will enhance your daily energy levels and athletic performance. Try this for a good breakfast: Oatmeal, multi-grain bagel with peanut butter, yogurt with granola, fruit and milk.
7. False. The primary fuel source is carbohydrate. Protein and fat also help make up the fuel source, and depending on your body chemistry and type of training, the amounts needed may vary. But carbohydrate comes into play the most when you are maximizing your efforts during practice. Aim for at least 50 % of your daily caloric intake to be carbohydrate. Whole grains, brown rice, beans, wheat bagels, fruits and vegetables are some excellent choices.
8. True. Eating smaller amounts of carbohydrate frequently throughout the day helps keep blood sugar and insulin levels closer to normal. You'll be able to pay better attention at school or work, have no hunger pangs and feel stronger at workouts.

If you answered at least five questions correctly, you're on the right path. If not, try to learn more about proper nutrition and making informed food choices.

Remember to eat a variety from all the food groups, eat colorful foods and eat and drink early and often.

Healthy foods offer nutrients that supply the body with energy. A good diet helps improve energy levels for training, concentration and recovery rates after hard workouts. It can profoundly impact swimming performance and general well-being.