

Fast Foods

10 Eating Rules for High Octane Performance

1. START YOUR DAY AT THE FUEL PUMP

When you wake up in the morning, your body hasn't received any nutrients for roughly eight hours. Trying to perform without eating breakfast is like a NASCAR driver trying to win the Daytona 500 on an empty tank-it simply isn't possible.

An ideal breakfast for an athlete delivers a balance of carbs (your muscles' preferred fuel source), protein and healthy fats. If you don't have an early workout, you can go big at breakfast. Opting for something like a veggie omelet accompanied with peanut butter on whole wheat toast, a piece of fruit, yogurt, and oatmeal with berries and nuts, can kick-start your day. But even if you do have a morning training session, you should still eat something. A banana with peanut butter or an apple and string cheese are light snacks that can help your body wake up and give you a boost heading into the gym.

2. TOP OFF THE TANK BEFORE YOUR WORKOUT

What you eat in the two-hour window before your training can have a huge impact on your performance. Not eating at all is one of the biggest mistakes you can make, because training on a completely empty stomach often results in the wheels coming off in the middle of a workout. But if you chow down on the wrong things, your body will be stuck in park when you need to be in drive.

Fuel up with a snack or small meal one to two hours prior to your workout so your body is primed to perform. Your focus should be on taking in simple, easily digested carbs-which your body uses for fuel. For examples of simple and complex carbs, see the sidebar "Fueling Field Guide: Simple vs Complex Carbohydrates" on page 2.

3. REFILL THE TANK AFTER YOU TRAIN

Your workout isn't finished when you walk out of the gym or off the track. Training, especially strength training breaks down the muscles in your body so they can grow stronger and more powerful later. Following an intense workout, the goal is to switch your body into muscle-building mode (called the anabolic state) by consuming nutrients that will help you repair muscle fibers, making them thicker and stronger. The ideal way to do this is to eat within a half-hour of the end of your workout. (You definitely don't want to wait longer than an hour.)

A good post-workout snack provides you with 4 grams of carbohydrates for every gram of protein it delivers. Many post-workout shakes deliver this ratio, making them a convenient way to get the nutrients you need to stimulate muscle growth. Aim to consume 20 grams of protein and 80 grams of carbohydrates following activity.

4. MAKE PIT STOPS EVERY THREE HOURS

The “three-meals-a-day” schedule isn’t ideal for athletes, who tend to have higher metabolisms and burn through calories fast. Instead, eat four to six small meals and snacks throughout the day, aiming to take in a balance of all three macronutrients - carbs, proteins and fat - at every meal. This approach will provide you with more sustained energy throughout the day and ensure you’re getting the amount of nutrients you need without having to stuff your face at a single sitting.

5. CRUISE WITH CARBS

Carbs are your main source of fuel during exercise. Having too few carbs in your system will leave you feeling like you’re moving under water – slow and plodding instead of fast and explosive. Broadly speaking, carbs come in two forms: simple and complex. Complex carbs, which break down slowly and provide a long-lasting energy supply, typically come from whole plant foods. These carbs are high in vitamins, minerals and fiber, and confer a huge number of long-term health benefits, including a lowered risk of obesity and disease. Simple carbs tend to be high in sugar but low in nutrients and fiber. Your body digests them faster, so they deliver energy very quickly.

FUELING FIELD GUIDE: SIMPLE VS. COMPLEX CARBOHYDRATES

Complex carbs takes your body longer to break down than simple carbs, which makes them a good choice for long lasting, sustainable energy with no crashes throughout the day. Simple carbs are a better choice shortly before a workout, when they can give your body a blast of easy energy to help power you through your training session, or immediately after training when they can help quickly refuel your muscles. Eating simple carbs at other times throughout the day isn’t a great idea, however, because they induce fat storage. Opt for simple carbs if you’re within 30 to 60 minutes of a workout and complex carbs throughout the rest of the day.

Complex Carbs Include:

- Whole grains like brown rice, oatmeal, quinoa and oats
- Foods like pasta, breads and cereals in whole grain form. Look for the words “whole wheat flour” to be high on the ingredient list to ensure you’re getting a food high in whole grains.
- Starchy vegetable such as sweet potatoes, potatoes, corn and pumpkin
- Beans and lentils
- Green vegetables

Simple Carbs Include:

- Fruits like bananas, oranges, apples and grapes
- White bread
- Fruit jellies or jams
- Honey
- Dried fruit
- Pretzels
- Crackers

6. POWER UP WITH PROTEIN

Unless you eat enough protein, you won’t build muscle. Without muscle, you’re like a car with no horsepower – you simply won’t have the raw power needed to go fast.

Aim to eat roughly one gram of protein for every pound of body weight per day. For example, if you are a 175-pound athlete, take in about 175 grams of protein throughout the day. How do you know how much protein is

in the foods you're eating? A good guideline is that a palm-sized portion of lean meat contains approximately 30 grams of protein.

When picking your protein, remember that grilled beats fried. Fried foods are laden with more calories and fat, which will slow you down over the long haul. Try to keep your protein clean and simple – for example, opt for a grilled chicken breast over one that's battered and deep fried.

FUELING FIELD GUIDE: PROTEIN CONTENT OF POPULAR FOODS

People commonly associate protein with meat, but there are other ways to get protein. Certain vegetables, grains, legumes and nuts all pack solid amounts of protein.

- 4 ounces of skinless chicken (about the size of a deck of cards): 40 grams of protein
- 6 ounces of cod or salmon: 40 grams
- 6 ounces of tuna in water: 40 grams
- 4 ounces of lean pork: 35 grams
- 4 ounces of lean red meat: 30 grams
- 6 ounces of tofu: 30 grams
- 1 cup of cottage cheese: 28 grams
- Cup of black, pinto or garbanzo beans: 15 grams
- 1/2 cup of whole almonds: 15 grams
- 1 cup of quinoa: 8 grams
- 2 tbsp of peanut butter: 8 grams
- 1 cup of milk (fat-free, 1%, 2%): 8grams
- 1 cup of peas: 8 grams
- 1 egg: 6 grams
- 1 cup of spinach: 5 grams

7. RACE WITH A RAINBOW OF FRUITS AND VEGGIES

In the race to fuel your body for speed, fruits, vegetables and legumes are neck-and-neck with protein sources in terms of importance. Fruits and veggies are nature's nutritional powerhouses. They're stuffed with vitamins, minerals and fiber and they're low in calories.

The average American, however, eats far too little produce. Between 2007 and 2010, only one in every 10 kids in the U.S. ate the recommended amount of vegetables per day, and only four in 10 consumed the recommended value for fruit. This is a problem because athletes cannot reach peak performance on protein alone. Micronutrients such as the vitamins and minerals provided by produce help support important functions within the body, including the delivery of oxygen to hard working muscle tissues during activity.

Simply put, there's no better chef than Mother Nature. Naturally occurring foods are incredibly nutrient-dense, meaning they serve up a ton of vitamins, fatty acids, protein and fiber with a small amount of calories. Sure, some processed foods have some of these same nutrients, but your body is generally better able to take nutrients from whole food sources. Try to "eat the rainbow." Consuming fruits and vegetables of different colors provides you with a wide range of nutrients.

8. SUPPLEMENTS AREN'T A SHORTCUT

Popping pills and downing powders can't make up for a poor diet. If you're pairing vitamin pills with a double-bacon cheeseburger, your body won't be fooled into thinking you're eating a balanced meal. Your body isn't as effective at drawing in nutrients from supplements as it is nutrients from real food. Furthermore, supplements aren't especially well-regulated in the U.S., meaning there's a good chance that what you put in your body when you pop a pill won't match up with what's advertised on the label.

Protein powder is a convenient way to reach your daily intake goal, and most are generally seen as effective. Some athletes are deficient in important micronutrients like magnesium and omega 3 fatty acids, so the use of supplements to get on track with those nutrients is fine. The bottom line: A cabinet full of supplements will never beat a fridge full of healthy food when it comes to building a better body.

9. WATER KEEPS YOU RUNNING

You've probably heard that your body is roughly 65 percent water. That alone should tell you how important H₂O is to your health and wellbeing. And though every living being on earth needs this magic fluid, it is especially important for athletes. It transports oxygen and nutrients throughout the body, aids in muscle contraction, fights fatigue and regulates body temperature. Being even slightly dehydrated can have a direct and profoundly negative impact on your performance. Studies have shown that just a 2-percent level of dehydration (i.e. losing 2 percent of your body weight in water) is enough to impact how you feel and play. And the more dehydrated you become, the more your performance will nosedive.

A good goal is to drink half of your body weight in ounces of water per day. If you weigh 160 pounds, you should take in 80 ounces of water during the day. While that sounds like a lot, it's just the equivalent of 10 small glasses. To get there, get in the habit of drinking water with every meal, and carry a water bottle with you throughout the day. Sip it when you feel thirsty, and refill it when it goes empty. Several containers include fluid markers on them, so you can know exactly how much water you're taking in. Soon you'll be hitting your hydration goal without a second thought.

10. PICK THE 85-PERCENT BLEND

Nobody's perfect, and trying to eat 100 percent healthy 100 percent of the time is a recipe for a breakdown. You'll be more susceptible to getting overwhelmed and giving up on eating healthy altogether.

That's where the 85-percent rule comes into play. If you can eat the right foods 85 percent of the time, that's good enough to have a huge impact on your performance and body composition. The other 15 percent of the time, you can sample different foods and indulge in some of your not-so-nutritious favorites. That way you'll get most everything you need, most of the time – included occasional reward for all of your hard work.

THE FEED FOR SPEED: WHAT TO PUT ON YOUR PLATE

Foods that are high in valuable nutrients are supercharged for speed and are great choices for fueling your tank on a regular basis. Other items should be seen as an occasional treat, otherwise you should toss 'em to the curb.

TANK 'EM

EAT THESE FOODS

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Beans and lentils (black, brown, garbanzo)
- Whole grains like oatmeal, quinoa, amaranth, brown rice, millet and couscous

TOSS 'EM

EAT RARELY IF EVER

- Soda (both diet and regular)
- Fast food
- Potato and tortilla chips
- Deep fried foods (donuts, General Tso's chicken, onion rings, etc.)

- Peanut butter and other natural nut butters
- Lean jerky
- Healthy oils such coconut oil and extra virgin olive oil
- Whole wheat and whole grain items such as pastas, breads, cereals. Look for the words “whole wheat flour” to be high on the ingredient list
- Fish like salmon, tuna and mackerel
- Whole eggs
- Unprocessed or low processed nuts
- Greek yogurt
- Lean chicken, beef and pork
- Snack cakes
- Candy bars
- Ice cream
- Overly dressed proteins (cheesesteaks, country-fried chicken, bacon cheeseburgers)
- Bacon
- Sugary cereals
- Alcohol
- Baked goods high in sugar

