



## **FOOD AND ATHLETES** (Quick nutrition considerations)



"I give you six months or 600 miles."

In general, as athletes, our bodies and food requirements are a little different than the Average Joe. Some of the differences are as follows:

- We **move** and **exert** ourselves a lot more => *calories to fuel these movements*
- **Carbohydrates** are our major fuel resource => *mainstream diets may not be appropriate*
- We **sweat** a lot more => *water, fluid replacement*
- Sweat contains **minerals** => *minerals need to be replaced (e.g. sodium)*
- **Free-radicals** are a by-product of exercise => *anti-oxidants are important in our diet*
- Constantly **breaking down** the muscles...and then rebuilding

them => *additional protein requirements*

- **Digestion and timing of meals** is important => *may not want to run on a full stomach, often hungry so may need more meals*
- **Snacks** are necessary => *typically blood sugar drops faster since higher metabolism and need for calories*

## **IF YOU'VE GOT A STABLE WEIGHT AND YOU'RE NOT THINKING ABOUT WINNING, WHY BOTHER?**

Good nutrition allows us to:

- Train **longer** (*ever bonk?*)
- Train **harder** (*ever feel sluggish?*)
- Strengthen our **immune system** (*ever get sick after mega workouts?*)
- **Reduce risk of illness** (*...related to immune system*)
- **Reduce risk of injury** (*well hydrated and fueled muscles are stronger*)
- Increase our **flexibility** (*hydrated muscles*)
- **Delay fatigue** and **recover faster** (*recovery is the KEY to training*)
- **Enjoy your workouts!**



"Just remember, son, it doesn't matter whether you win or lose—unless you want Daddy's love."



## SO WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO EAT BETTER? WHAT SHOULD WE FOCUS ON?



*"It has come to my attention, Collins, that you are hydrating on company time."*

### 1. Water.

It's really obvious and yes, it is possible to drink too much, however, in general, most people need to drink more water during training. Even mild dehydration has a big impact on performance. Also, although sports drinks have their place, try and drink pure water (with minerals if possible) – although liquid substances, tea, coffee, gatorade, beer and margaritas do not count!

### 2. Carbohydrates for Performance

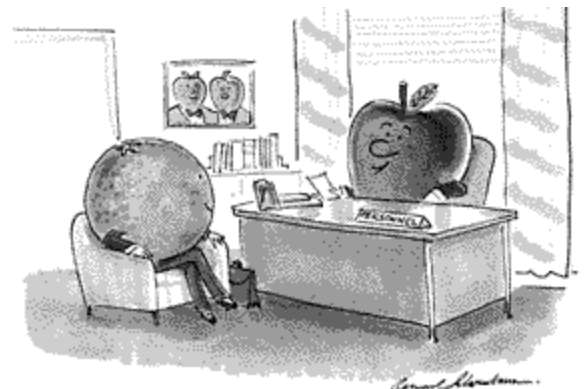
Athletes need carbs! They are our primary, number-one fuel source – and are needed to access/burn our fat. However **quality carbohydrates** are key. What are quality carbs?

- **Whole grains** – wheat, spelt, quinoa, oats...
  - Whole grain **bread**s – in particular *sprouted* grains are easier to digest (more minerals and vitamins in them via the sprouting process)
  - Whole grain **pastas** (the box will say *whole grain*)
  - Starchy **vegetables** like sweet potatoes, peas, potato, carrots...
  - **Legumes** (beans, lentils, chickpeas/hummus, soybeans...)
- Brown **rice**, **cereal** etc.

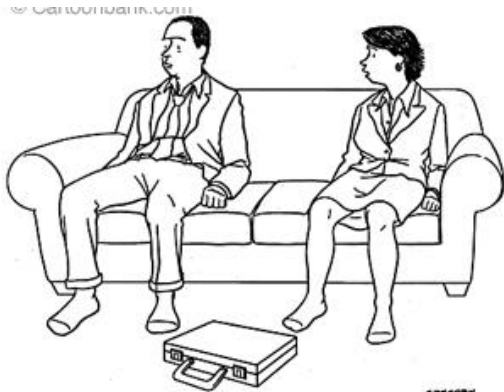
### 3. Fruits & Vegetables.

Aside from being an excellent weight-loss strategy, why? Many reasons:

- They are **high-water** content foods which means they help you hydrate
- They are **high-fiber** foods
- They are high in **potassium** and sodium-potassium ratios are important
- Most importantly they are packed with **vitamins** and **minerals** (...many of which are powerful antioxidants)
- **Variety** -- there are so many fruits and vegetables to choose from, and, especially in the summer, they taste great!



*"As an orange, how much experience have you had working with apples?"*



*"Well, we can eat out, order in, or just sit here and let our bodies slowly gnaw away at our muscle tissue."*

#### 4. Protein – choosing lean, high-quality sources

Protein usually gets too much attention – at the expense of carbs! – but it is important to choose high quality protein sources and to ensure we are getting enough. Many of the protein sources are often high in fat plus the protein may not be absorbed by our bodies (a “biological value” – or absorption/utilization value - is assigned to different sources) – the best sources are whey protein (use it in smoothies, drinks), eggs, grass-fed beef and fish. If you are vegan/vegetarian it’s especially important to ensure you’re getting enough protein – usually in the form of tofu, seitan, tempeh, rice and beans.

#### 5. Avoiding Trans Fats – “hydrogenated” oils/fats

Trans fats are present in sooooo many foods these days – crackers, Fig newtons, salad dressings.....*anything* with oil or fat (and what doesn’t have oil or fat?) has the potential to use ‘trans fats’. These fats not only raise your bad cholesterol (LDL), they also lower your good cholesterol (HDL). Watch your labels – look for “**hydrogenated**” or “**partially hydrogenated**” in the ingredient list....and if you see it, please put the product back on the shelves!



*"The cracks can be fixed—it's your cholesterol level that worries me."*

#### 6. QUALITY versus QUANTITY: processed and refined foods

As athletes, our waistlines often don’t show the dessert, cookies, snacking and, well, eating anything and everything we want! However from a performance, healthy, feel-good standpoint there IS a difference between foods. We want to choose the best, most **nutritious quality foods** – the ones that are going to give us the most **nutrient-bang for our buck**. *Refined* foods are ‘empty’ foods (for example white flour was once a nutritious whole grain....but, through *refining*, it has been reduced to a white flour product void of all its original minerals and vitamins) – and while *some* empty calories aren’t going to impact us too much....it’s important not to have too many of them. Also, refined foods – since they lack the minerals and vitamins in the



*"Just keep reminding yourself that canned is better than dry."*

product – actually rob our bodies of minerals and vitamins....another BIG reason to stay away (since this is already an area where athletes are deficient).



*"We'll catch 'em and cook 'em when the sugar wears off."*

### 7. Sugars, sugars, sugars

Sports drinks – or most sugary drinks marketed to athletes are in the same category as refined foods – but I wanted to give them special attention. Again, as athletes, carbs (sugars or complex) are our main fuel source...and they are really important. However, just be aware that the majority of sports drinks and gels (the bars are better – depending on what you choose) are **empty calories** – they are refined sugars (not high quality natural sugars like fruit or natural sweeteners). Obviously these drinks are very convenient – especially on long rides or in races – however, they are not critical. I trained and raced for the Ironman last year and did it all on pure, natural juices, fruit and real food – I share this as an example that you will not fall over with starvation or be left stranded at the back of the pack if you do not consume the latest sports drink!

### 8. Supplements.

I think it's a really good idea to supplement with a **liquid** (better absorption) mineral and/or multi-vitamin supplement – especially if you are training for longer distance events. However I'm not a big fan of 'single-supplements' unless you definitely know that you are deficient in a particular mineral/vitamin (for example B12 is tough to get on a vegan diet so that would be a case where single supplementing might be necessary). However, most importantly, **know what you are taking** – don't follow the latest fad or what's been recommended at the vitamin store until you really know how it works.



*"Something from the supplement cart?"*



*"Is that legal? Can the old man force me to take a performance-enhancing drug."*

### 9. What's that ingredient?

Sort of related to refined foods, but many athletic products have a laundry list of chemicals, artificial sweeteners and other unknown "foods" (pick up any protein bar and I guarantee you can't pronounce most of the ingredients let alone know what they do or where they come from). Everyone is different and it's important to do what works for you but my philosophy is that the body works best on clean, organic natural foods. Some substances might give a temporary boost to performance but man (or rats or mice in all studies!) cannot live on chemicals alone! Again, just know what you are taking in....



*"It's no use, Brenda, you're a vegan, and I'm the Eastern Seaboard senior sales rep for Amalgamated Pure Pork Portions, listed on the New York Stock Exchange as APPP. Yum yum, and not a bad buy at that."*

### **10. Everyone is different.**

There are obviously many diets out there and I'm sure many of your fellow athletes will tell you – often with conviction! – that you must eat meat or dairy or you can't drink or eat too much fat...or whatever the case may be. I encourage you to listen to YOUR body – we all have a different biochemistry, genes, make-up...and different fuels work differently in different bodies...and even at different times and temperatures/seasons. Listen to YOUR body and TRUST how it guides you. ☺

### **SUMMARY:**

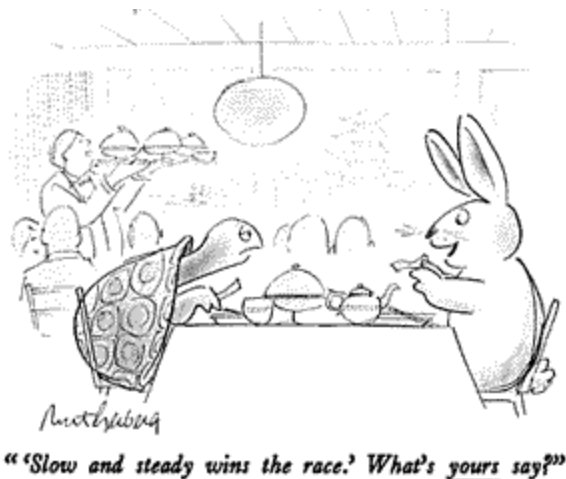
**Water**  
**Fruits & Vegetables**  
**Carbohydrates for Performance**  
**Protein – lean, high-quality sources**  
**Avoid Trans Fats (Hydrogenated oils/fats)**  
**Quality versus Quantity**  
(avoid processed and refined)  
**Sugars, sugars, sugars – empty calories**  
**Supplements (watch)**  
**Know your ingredients**  
**Everyone is different – listen to YOUR body!**



## MAKING CHANGES

Typically when you change your exercise program – for example add intervals or a long ride once a week – you notice changes very quickly. Unfortunately, nutritional changes **often take a long time** to manifest – we certainly don't have that instant feedback loop. A good example is if you are low in iron (anemia) – you can start to supplement and increase iron sources but it will be approx. 2-4 months before your red blood cells change and you get your full energy back.

My advice is to **incorporate little changes** into your diet....and whatever your goal is (to loose a few pounds, have more energy, stop snacking, have a few more vegetables each week etc.)...just **stick with it**. Consistency is the key to results. There will be many days you will fall back to your old habits – the important part is to keep coming back to your goal. For example, if you want to reduce the amount of soda you drink, then make that your goal and every day work on it. If you even go one day without drinking the soda you've made an improvement, right? Stick with it, don't give up and most of all just **enjoy** the food – fuel – you eat!



If you would like to contact Mel for a health consultation she can be reached at  
[mel@melanieashmore.com](mailto:mel@melanieashmore.com). Happy Eating!