

FUEL YOUR
FITNESS
WITH FOOD

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HOW, WHAT & WHEN TO EAT TO MEET
YOUR FITNESS GOALS



W E L L N E S S S E R I E S

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Introduction: Why Focus on Nutrition?

Good nutrition is essential for an effective fitness program. What you put into your body plays a key role not only in how you feel and look, but also in how you perform. If you haven't been paying much attention to your nutrition before now, today is the day your life is going to change – for the better.

Here's what you get when you focus a bit more on your nutrition.

Increased Energy

Have you ever had a workout where you felt like you were putting in your all, but you were getting lackluster results? It happens to everyone at some point or another.

Maybe they didn't get enough sleep the night before, maybe they're a bit dehydrated, or maybe they skipped breakfast. To get the most out of your workout you have to give your body the fuel it needs.



Better Results

Whether your goal is to run a faster 5K, to deadlift your bodyweight, or to get a personal record in your spin class, paying attention to your nutrition yields better fitness results. What you put into your body matters. And it shows during your workouts. You'll feel more powerful, you'll gain endurance, and you'll have the mental strength to push yourself just a bit harder.

Faster Recovery

When you exercise, you deplete your body of certain nutrients, fluid, and energy. Even a moderate effort breaks down your muscles, and that requires a recovery period. Guess what...?

That recovery period burns calories and requires good nutrition. If you want to reduce the amount of time you're sore, if you want to be able to work out hard again the next day, and if you want to continue to improve your results, good nutrition can make a significant impact on your results.

Weight Loss

Some people, maybe you, exercise to eat. It's the "I'll run another mile so I can have a piece of cake" approach. This is a surefire path to weight gain, not weight loss. Why? Well, for one thing, you're putting the wrong type of calories and food into your body. No, we're not saying don't have a piece of cake sometimes.

What we're saying is don't trade exercise for food. 99.9% of people overestimate the calories they burn and underestimate the calories they consume. This leads to weight gain. On top of that, it just detracts from your workout.

If you shift your focus to improving your nutrition, you will likely find that you can work out less and still lose weight (and still have the occasional cookie or piece of cake).

How to Use This Guide

This guide covers four basic exercise goals that you might have. They include increasing your cardio performance, increasing your strength without adding bulk, increasing strength while adding bulk, and improved cross-training performance.

To get started, we recommend reading this book through from beginning to end. You'll see that in some areas – hydration, for example – there may be overlaps. However, you will also find that some goals have specific nutrition approaches, and this information will be good to know as you move forward.

As you move through this book...

Identify Your Goal

Once you've read the book, go back and identify the goal that most relates to your desire and current fitness program. For example, if you are cross-training then you will want to choose that goal and nutrition approach.

Assess Your Current Diet and Nutrition

Take from one day to one full week to assess what you are currently eating. Write down what you eat, when you eat it, how much, and consider also taking a look at the nutrition information including calories, protein, carbs, sugar etc. Get to know what you are currently putting into your body.



Do this without judging yourself. We all have to start somewhere. Right now, you're simply taking a good close look at your starting point. This information will be invaluable as you begin to make changes to improve your nutrition and ultimately your exercise results.

Leverage the Tips into Your Daily Nutrition/Eating Habits

Each fitness goal that's provided comes with some basic guidelines and recommendations. Start making small changes to your current routine and shift your nutrition and eating habits.

For example, if you normally have a soda in the afternoon, maybe shift that soda to an iced tea or iced coffee without sugar, or a carbonated water. Slight changes make a big difference.

Learn as You Go and Adapt

The recommendations in this book are general because, let's be honest, there is no diet and nutrition approach that fits everybody. Your body may need more protein or more carbs for better performance. Become aware of what you eat and how you feel. Pay attention and consider journaling or tracking this information. Honor your body's needs and fuel it appropriately.

Let's dive into the first goal.

Fitness Goal #1 Improved Running and Cardio Performance

For many athletes, the goal is to improve their time for a specific distance. For example, they may have a 30-minute 5K time that they want to improve upon. To improve running performance, you'll need a blend of increased strength and increased cardio output. You have to be faster, and your lungs and heart need to be able to support that increased speed.

So that type of goal – to improve your running time or distance – is quite specific and it requires a focused approach to your nutrition.

There are a lot of myths around running and nutrition. The biggest one is to carbo load. You know, to eat a plate of spaghetti the night before a race so that you have carbs to burn during the race. Another myth that is more recent is the fat burning or ketogenic approach. While there may be some validity to a keto approach, the science is still out, and in any case it's an incredibly difficult dietary approach to take.

So, let's look at a more reasonable, and scientifically backed, approach to nutrition to increase running performance.

Hydration

Don't start a run or cardio workout dehydrated. Just don't do it. Your performance will suffer and you can harm your body. This is especially important on hot days. On a really hot day you can lose more than two liters (about 67 ounces) of fluids per hour during exercise. That being said, you also don't want to drink a gallon of water before a race.



You can over-hydrate. So, what's the perfect amount? Strive to drink 64 ounces of fluids each day. And for each hour that you exercise, add 8 ounces to that. The day before a race or a strenuous run, make sure your urine is light yellow and you don't feel thirsty.

If you sweat a lot, then you'll want to drink more. A pound of lost weight equates to 16 ounces of water. You can weigh yourself before and after a workout to tell if you're losing a lot of fluids when you run.

Electrolytes

Electrolytes are minerals like calcium, sodium, magnesium, and potassium. They are important for cellular function, and when you get dehydrated your electrolytes are imbalanced.

Generally speaking, unless you're sweating a lot or running long distances (10k or more), you probably don't need to supplement electrolytes. And let's face it, those electrolyte replacement drinks are packed with sugar. Do make sure, however, that you are eating whole foods regularly, or take a multivitamin with minerals to make sure you're getting what you need.

Carbohydrates

Ah, carbs... are they evil or good or... both? Depends on the carb, right? There's a big difference between the carbs in a banana and the carbs in a muffin. Carbs are absolutely necessary for your body. It's the simplest form of fuel and, as a runner, you do need carbs.

However, strive to make sure that you are consuming whole foods and carbs from plants rather than starchy or processed carbs. Strive to get about 5 grams per kilogram of body weight per day. A kilogram is equal to 2.2 pounds so if you weigh 165, that's about 75 kilograms, which means about 373 grams of carbs. For reference, a banana has about 27 grams of carbs.

Fat

Fat gets a bad rap. Fat is actually quite important for your body. It protects your cells and it's easily turned into energy for your body. The problem is that not all fats are good fats.

Some fats don't break down well for energy and are put right into fat storage. Some fats actually create chemical processes in your body that cause harm. For example, trans-fats raise your bad cholesterol and lower your good cholesterol.

When we talk about fats and nutrition, we're talking about the good plant based fats. Fats from nuts and seeds, fats from avocados, and fats from fish are all healthy for you. They're protective and can improve your fitness nutrition. Olive oil is an example of a healthy fat that you can enjoy in your cooking, on your salads, and even in your baking.

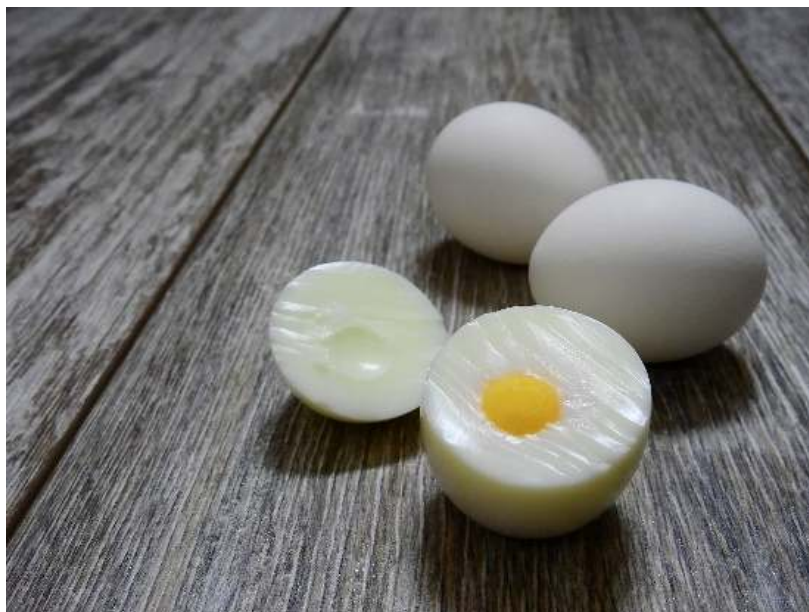
Protein

To improve your running performance, you'll want to make sure you also focus on protein. You need this for muscle repair so that your muscles can get stronger and therefore faster. Like carbs, there's a general rule of thumb that says 1-1.5 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight. So that 165-pound person would want about 75 grams of protein each day. There are 6 grams of protein in one egg.

The most important thing to remember when building a nutrition program for this goal, or for any goal, is to make sure the quality of your food is top priority. Whole foods, foods that don't come in packages, are best. Another way to think about it is that whole foods have one ingredient.

There's nothing else in a brussels sprout or a chicken thigh. Yes, you can season it and add sauces and such, but the basic food is pure. Processed foods come with a variety of stabilizers, preservatives, colorings and so on. The quality of your food is priority number one.

Okay, let's look at what a day of nutrition might look like if your goal is to improve your running performance.



Day to Day

Day to day you should generally be consuming 3 meals a day with two light snacks. Try to keep your ratio 30/30/40. that is to say 30% protein, 30% fat (healthy fats), and 40% carbs.

This ratio is best for muscle recovery and energy performance.

Here's what a proportioned meal might look like:

- Breakfast – A cup of steel cut oats, a tablespoon of chopped nuts, a handful of raspberries and a hardboiled egg.
- Lunch – Chicken salad on whole grain bread with an apple or other piece of fruit.
- Dinner – A piece of baked chicken with 1 cup of dark leafy greens (like spinach) sautéed in olive oil, and mashed sweet potatoes.

Before Exercise

Strive to eat one to one and a half hours before you exercise to ensure digestion before you work out. If you feel nauseous while you're working out, then you probably need more time to digest. Hydrate before you work out as well.

Your meal before working out should follow the basic 40/30/30 plan. Consider avoiding red meat as this takes longer to digest.



During Exercise

You shouldn't have to eat while you work out unless you're exercising for more than two hours. If you're exercising for longer than two hours, then look into fat-burning solutions that provide instant fuel for your body like gels, sports beans, and even bananas.

Post-Workout Recovery

After your workout, you can have a few more carbohydrates if you want. It depends on how hard you worked out. If you feel like your energy may be depleted, bump up your carb intake to 45 or even 50 percent of your meal or snack. A good recovery meal is a fruit smoothie with a scoop of protein powder in it.

Try this recipe:

Mixed Berry Protein Smoothie Recipe

Combine the following ingredients in a blender.

- 12 oz water
- 1 cup spinach
- 2 cups frozen mixed berries
- 1/2 cup yogurt (Plain without added sugar is best)
- 2 scoops vanilla protein powder
- 1 tbsp walnuts or almonds
- 1 tbsp ground flaxseed

Enjoy

Fitness Goal #2 Improve Strength Without Adding Bulk

If your goal is to tone your body and get stronger without adding bulk, then you're likely performing a lot of bodyweight movements like squats, pushups, lunges and so on. Yoga and Pilates also fit into this category. The role of carbs, fat, and protein don't change. However, if your goal is to get lean and toned, then there are some key differences in how you approach nutrition.

Day to Day

Day to day you want to really focus on the carbohydrates in the form of plant-based nutrients. Eat your veggies! Half of your plate for any meal or snack should be vegetables. You can eat fruit, but one or two pieces a day is sufficient. Protein plays another critical role in your recovery and strength building.

Look for lean proteins and avoid high fat foods. However, keep in mind that "low fat" on a nutrition label of a processed food generally means added sugar. To get fat into your diet, nuts and avocados are great sources of healthy fat. For example, there are 14 grams of fat in one ounce of almonds (which is about 23 almonds).

Before Exercise

Eat an hour to an hour and a half before you work out to make sure your food is digested. You can also exercise on an empty stomach, provided you ate a good meal within the past 4-5 hours. Make sure you're well hydrated.

During Exercise

There's no need to consume anything during exercise. If you're thirsty, do take sips of water. It's important to stay hydrated.

Post-Workout Recovery

There's no need to have any post-workout nutrition plan. If you exercised on an empty stomach, it is important to eat within 30 minutes of working out. Make sure you're eating a balanced meal of carbohydrates, protein, and a little healthy fat.

Post-workout is often a great time to grab a healthy snack. Make sure the snack has protein so your muscles have the nutrients they need to repair. A good example would be an apple and some almond butter to hold you over until your next meal.

Fitness Goal #3 Improve Strength and Add Muscle

Adding muscle or “bulk” to your body requires patience, spending a good amount of time in the gym, and careful attention to your nutrition. Again, protein, carbs, and fat all play the same role in your fueling. Protein helps repair muscle cells, carbohydrates and fats provide energy. Fats burn slower than carbs, but eat too much fat it’s simply stored as fat tissue in your body.

To improve strength and add muscle, you want to pay careful attention to the sugar you take into your body. If you can reduce, or eliminate, added sugar then you’ll reduce fat storage, encourage fat burning, and you’ll reduce inflammation in your body.

By reducing your sugar intake, you’ll put yourself in a position where the new bulk you gain will be visible because there isn’t a thick layer covering it. You’ll look muscular.

Okay, to build strength and add bulk you want to make sure you’re getting enough protein. Yes, carbs and fats are still important to your health and energy. But you’ll need some extra protein in your diet to help build and repair those muscle fibers.

How much protein? Aim for 1.5 to 2 grams per kg of bodyweight. If you weigh 165 pounds then you’ll want 100-150 grams of protein a day. Start on the lower end of that scale and increase your protein intake if you’re not seeing muscle gain and increased strength after three months.



Day to Day

Make sure you're getting a good source of protein with every meal, including snacks. One way to make sure you're getting good nutrition and all your protein needs is to drink protein smoothies. Make them with a good fat milk like almond or coconut milk, add the fruits and/or veggies that you like, and a scoop of your favorite protein powder.

****A Note About Protein Powders.**

There are many different types of protein powders and they come in myriad flavors. There are vegan plant-based proteins made from peas, hemp, and other grains. You can also find egg white protein and, of course, whey protein. Whey is considered to be the best, but some people have allergies to it (it comes from cow's milk), so it's not right for everyone.

Before Exercise

Eat before you exercise, but make sure your food has digested. A balanced meal with carbs, protein, and fats is recommended. Keep it lighter because you'll be eating right after you work out.

During Exercise

Don't eat when you work out. Save your energy for your muscles. Do stay hydrated.



Post-Workout Recovery

The most important part of your nutrition for strength and muscle building is the post-workout nutrition. Make sure that you consume protein within 30 minutes of working out.

Protein helps your cells begin the repair process, which strengthens them and builds muscle. It also helps reduce DOMS (delayed onset muscle soreness), which means you can get back to the gym and back to working out the next day.

If you can eat real food, great. Grab a salad with a steak or a chicken sandwich. However, most people are hard pressed to find good nutrition immediately after your workout.

Protein smoothies! Here's another recipe to consider trying:

Chocolate Banana Nut Butter Smoothie

In a blender, combine the following:

- 12 oz milk or milk substitute
- 2 scoops chocolate flavored protein powder
- 1 banana
- 2 tbsp of natural peanut butter or almond butter
- 1 tbsp cocoa powder

Fitness Goal #4 Improved Cross-Training Performance & Results

Cross-training includes activities like CrossFit, HIIT, many functional fitness programs, and of course if you have your own cross-training program. Many of these fitness approaches adhere to specific nutrition guidelines. We're taking a look at the three most popular and sharing a bit about their philosophy and how they can help you achieve your fitness and nutrition goals.

The Paleo Diet

You may have heard about the Paleo approach. The Paleo Diet was based on research about how different foods interact in the human body. The goal is to remove the most common irritants from the diet and to get back to what our ancestors ate.

Many people believe that if you're on the Paleo Diet all you do is eat meat. This isn't true. What you do eat includes; meat, fish, eggs, veggies, fruit, nuts and seeds. That leaves a lot of room for variety, right? You don't eat grains, beans, peanuts, dairy, or refined or processed foods. There are no limits on how much you eat or how much you eat. It's about putting quality food into your body.

People choose Paleo because it isn't too rigid, it has good results, and they feel more energetic, stronger, and healthier when they're on it. If you're interested in learning more about the Paleo Diet, Dr. Loren Cordain is the founder and his books are informative and easy to follow.

The Zone Diet

The Zone Diet was created by Dr. Sears. It is a low carbohydrate diet that helps people lose weight and improve their physical and mental performance. Zone requires followers to measure their food and, through a series of questions, helps each dieter determine how many carb, protein, and fat grams they should eat in a meal or snack.

Zone does not limit the foods that you can eat. If you want to eat sugar, dairy, or grains you certainly can. However, because of the grams of carbs or fat in some processed foods, you may find that you're hungry.

Conversely, if you eat only vegetables, you may find that there are too many veggies on your plate to eat in one meal. So, balance can be tricky to find initially.

Many people actually combine Paleo and Zone, but this can feel very limiting and restrictive. It's recommended that you ease into this approach. Choose one, Zone or Paleo, and then gradually add the other.

Whole30

Whole 30 is a thirty-day elimination diet. You eliminate all sugar, dairy, alcohol, and grains from your diet. You eat only whole foods like fruits, vegetables, meat, nuts and seeds. No processed foods are allowed, and no foods that simulate processed foods are allowed.

People follow this diet or nutrition approach to reset their habits, to identify allergies or sensitivities, or to just take charge of their health and challenge themselves for 30 days. The Whole30 approach has a loyal social media following, and there is an abundance of recipe sites and resources. This approach can be a great step leading toward Paleo and/or Zone if you want to make gradual changes to your diet and lifestyle.

Ideally, you now have some idea of the fitness goal that's right for you. Before you head to the grocery store or start cleaning the junk food out of your cupboards, these final tips are for you. Read them, embrace them, and succeed in improving your fitness performance, results, and nutrition.



Five Tips to Embrace Better Nutrition for Your Exercise Goals

#1 Reduce Added Sugar in Your Diet

Added sugar is wasted calories. Worse, sugar causes inflammation, weight gain, fatigue and much more. Conversely, when you cut back on the sugar in your diet, you'll lose weight, have more energy, your appearance will improve, you'll sleep better, and your immune system will be stronger.

#2 Hydrate

Hydration is particularly important if you're exercising for more than an hour or if it's particularly hot outside. It's also important for energy production at the cellular level and for your metabolism.

You might be surprised that one of the early signs of dehydration isn't thirst, it's often fatigue, hunger, and even a headache. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink a glass of water. Set a daily hydration goal to drink at least 6-8 eight-ounce glasses of water a day.

#3 Timing of Foods Can Be Important

We've talked about before, during, and after workout nutrition with each fitness goal. This is because the timing of your meals plays a role in your performance and recovery. Eating too close to a workout can slow you down. Eating protein immediately after a workout speeds your recovery.

While these are general truths, you'll want to experiment with your own food timing to find the routine that's right for you. For example, maybe it takes you longer to digest and you want to eat two hours before you work out. Or maybe you like to exercise first thing in the morning on an empty stomach, so what you eat the night before can make a big difference.

Pay attention to your body and make small adjustments to find the ideal routine for you.

#4 Combination of Foods Is Important

It's rarely good to eat just protein or just carbs. Generally speaking, you want to make sure that you're getting a bit from each nutrition category at each snack and meal. This may feel a bit tricky at first. Be patient.

You'll become accustomed to looking at your plate and knowing if you're getting protein, fat, and carbs, or if something is missing. And unless you're on the Zone Diet, there's a bit of wiggle room within each meal. Your breakfast may be more carb heavy and your lunch may have a bit more protein.

It's also important, again, to pay attention to your body. You may find that you require a bit more protein than the standard 40/30/30 guideline or you may find that you need more carbs. Small adjustments that honor your unique body style and fitness can make a big difference in your results. Listen to what your body tells you, become aware of how you feel after you eat and drink different things, and make the necessary changes to be your best.

#5 Cut Yourself Some Slack Occasionally

It's very easy to become rigid about what you do and don't eat. That's okay. It's okay to only want to put good things into your body and to strive to fuel yourself optimally. It's also okay to take a day off once in a while. It's okay to have a "cheat" day or a rest day.

For example, you might follow the Paleo Diet six days a week, and on the seventh day you take the day off and eat what you want. You might eliminate all added sugar from your diet six days a week, but on the seventh day you don't worry about it. Find small ways to cut yourself a little slack so that you can go back to your nutrition goals and guidelines with confidence and motivation.

Conclusion

Improving your nutrition is a lifelong process. It doesn't happen overnight. That's why setting a goal to improve your nutrition and to improve your fitness and exercise is a smart approach. It gives you the foundation and the framework to begin to make small changes, and to be able to measure the results.

You'll be able to connect the changes to the results.

- You'll feel how hydration improves your endurance.
- You'll notice that the post-workout protein reduces soreness.
- You'll experience how eating plant-based carbohydrates gives you more energy.

Consider, as you identify your goal and begin to improve your nutrition, keeping a nutrition or exercise journal. It'll help you pay attention to the changes you're making and how they're impacting your fitness and health.

To your success!