

## In the Nutrition Lane

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# Principles of a Healthy Diet for Peak Performance

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A good diet alone won't make a champion swimmer, but especially at high levels of competition, the right diet can often provide the edge that marks a winner. Eating well helps keep you healthy to train optimally, and allows your body to gain the most benefit from training as well as to recover from stresses of workouts and competition. Most importantly, *what you choose to fuel your body with greatly increases the probability that you can swim up to your natural potential.*

Here are some principles of eating for optimizing performance:

1. **Distribute foods fairly evenly throughout the day.** Eating several times a day (four to six times) is good for all of us; this eating pattern is associated with better control of blood sugar, blood cholesterol, and body weight. For swimmers, it helps provide adequate fuel for workouts, as well as to get through the day feeling energetic and positive. One of the features of low blood sugar is irritability or even feeling gloomy. If you are a meal-skipper, experiment with how eating more often affects your attitude and *how you feel* during the day.

2. **Start your day with at least some protein** (milk or yogurt, lean meat or eggs, cheese or peanut butter) **and high-quality carbohydrate.** Protein helps to sustain energy levels (and appetite). Be careful to choose the best sources of protein, though: Avoid fried foods; prepare eggs with no added fat, and moderate amounts of high-fat foods such as cheese and peanut butter. Choose the natural peanut butter (oil on the top) for the best quality fat, or even try some other nut butters such as cashew or almond butter. Carbohydrates *at any time of day* should be accompanied by fiber, but this may be especially important for the first meal of the day. High-fiber carb's (i.e., oatmeal, whole grain dry cereals and bread, berries) are more slowly digested, and therefore, don't spike blood sugar levels the way simple carbohydrates do (white flour foods, fiber-free cereals, and fruit juices).

3. **Aim for at least four servings of vegetables and at least two fruits per day.** These can be all the same vegetable or a mixture on any given day, but there should be variety within the week. Vegetables and fruit provide an abundance of vitamins and minerals as well as *phytochemicals*, substances found only in plant foods that researchers are just beginning to understand promote health and prevent diseases such as heart disease and cancer.

4. **Drink lots of water daily – at least six 8-ounce cups if you are under 100 pounds, and around 8-12 if you are over 100.** Remember that water is crucial to efficient body function; even mild dehydration impairs performance.

Attention to diet can unquestionably help your performance. Equally important, it may help you to be still swimming when you are in your 40s, 50s, and beyond, maybe even setting some Masters' records!