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# Nutritional Needs in Sports

If you thought that sports nutrition is all about taking plenty of proteins, water and supplements, you couldn't be farther from the truth. Good nutrition is the lifeline for sports persons and can be a means to winning a goal. Eating the right food at the right time can help the sports person train well, recover fast, maintain health and perform to his / her best.

The calorie requirements vary from sport to sport and from person to person in each sport. While speed or power events need about 6000 calories per day, team games require approximately 4500 calories per day. Moderate proteins with sufficient carbohydrates will ensure energy and muscle strength. The protein requirement varies from 1.2 g to 2 g per kg body weight and should be about 15 to 20 % of the total energy intake. To increase lean body mass, proteins need to be included in each meal but bingeing on proteins is not a healthy idea. Instant muscle gain is not possible so one needs to be patient and persevere the training. Fluids cannot be emphasized enough for a sports person. As little as 2% fluid loss will lead to performance impairment. The type of fluid depends on the activity, duration and time of intake. Ask your nutritionist for advice on sports drinks. Breakfast is vital, and the need for salt (particularly sodium) increases with increased number of training hours. Though there is a higher requirement for some of the B vitamins, calcium and iron, these are easily met through a well balanced diet.

Greasy foods are a 'no-no' for sports. Though total fat intake is increased in order to match the higher calorie requirement in sports, overeating of fried foods or high fat foods will change the body composition and hinder performance. Saturated fats should be restricted. High sugar foods are best used in small quantities. Supplements are no substitute for a health-building,



nutritious food intake. Salt requirements can be met through the diet and there's no need for salt tablets. Junk foods that are high fat and / or high sugar are to be kept away completely. Alcohol can be dehydrating – use judiciously if needed; but definitely not before, during or after an event. A qualified nutritionist / dietitian will be able to guide sports persons on how to obtain their nutritional requirements.

Ultimately, maintenance of a healthy body by adjusting food intake and physical activity according to the individual needs is the key factor for good sport activities.

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