



UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF A HIGH CARBOHYDRATE DIET

With so much information available to the public about diet and fitness it is sometimes hard to get the complete picture. The Atkins Diet and Zone diet seem to have people of all ages convinced that they need to stay away from Carbohydrates if they want to maintain a healthy body weight. This article is going to address some common myths about carbohydrates and review the importance of this nutrient in relation to sports performance.

Carbohydrate Myths:

1. Carbohydrates are fattening. Carbohydrates are not fattening, excess calories are fattening. When you take in more energy (calories from food) than you expend your body will store the excess as fat. The carbohydrates that you eat are first broken down into glucose molecules and then stored as glycogen in your muscles or liver to be used as a fuel source. If the fuel is not used and you continue to consume carbohydrates the excess will be converted into body fat. Extra calories from carbohydrates (breads, cereals, pasta) are actually less fattening than excess calories from fat in the diet (butter, oils, sauces). Your body can easily convert dietary fat into body fat, however it takes energy in the form of calories to convert carbohydrates into body fat.

2. White breads should be restricted because they are converted to body fat immediately. White bread is considered a high carbohydrate source. Your body will break it down and use the calories the same way it would with other grain products. While it is missing a lot of the nutritional value (fibre and B vitamins) of whole grain products it can be part of a balanced diet. White bread can actually be an ideal food for competition meals and snacks because it does not contain any fibre which can weigh down athletes and cause stomach upset. A peanut butter sandwich on white bread with a cup of juice would be an ideal recovery snack.

Carbohydrates and Performance:

Carbohydrates are the preferred fuel for sports. They are the only fuel for your brain, eyes, red blood cells and central nervous system and they are stored in limited supply. Your dietary intake of carbohydrates will determine if you will be able to train and compete to the best of your ability.

If your diet is low in grain products, vegetables, and fruit your muscles will not have a full tank of glycogen (stored glucose)

- Not enough glycogen = Heavy tired muscles
- = Poor performance
- = General Fatigue
- = Poor recovery between training sessions

An athletes diet should contain 60 to 70% total calories from carbohydrates. Try to include some high carbohydrate foods at each meal and snack. Here is a list of some high carbohydrate foods:

- 100% fruit juices
- Applesauce, sweetened
- Dried fruits, dried fruit bars
- Fresh fruit
- Carrots
- Corn
- Potatoes
- Fruit flavored low-fat yogurt
- Bagel
- Whole wheat or white breads
- Dry cereals
- Oatmeal
- Graham crackers
- English muffin
- Pretzels
- Popcorn
- Pasta
- Pancakes
- Fig Newton bars
- Rice
- Fruit granola bars
- Waffles
- Rice crackers
- Arrow root cookies

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