

Following a nutritious, well-balanced diet is the key for a healthy lifestyle. Try incorporating these nutrient-packed foods to help you build strength, sustain energy, and recover faster.

**Chocolate Milk:** Contrary to popular belief, you don't need large amounts of protein after a workout. Simple carbohydrates with some protein (2:1 ratio) is really what your body needs. You can find ready to drink chocolate milk or you can mix up a glass of milk with chocolate syrup and get the same benefits. Look for chocolate syrup that does not have "high fructose corn syrup" on the ingredient list.

**Nuts and Natural Nut Butter:** Nuts contain a healthy combination of both protein and healthy fats. They are easy to digest and can help balance your blood sugar when paired with carbohydrates.

**Cruciferous Vegetables:** While all vegetables are good vegetables, dark, leafy greens and members of the cruciferous family (broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and kale) have higher concentrations of antioxidants, fiber, and other important nutrients that are important for optimal recovery.

**Bananas:** While they may not be as convenient as bars or gels, bananas are a good option for those seeking an alternative that is natural and not processed. Bananas are an excellent post-event recovery food due to their potassium content (422mg in 1 medium banana), which the body needs to regulate fluids and prevent muscle cramps and spasms. Because we sweat out potassium during physical activity, it's important to replenish as soon as possible following activity.

**Pasta:** Carbohydrates are the most important component of an athlete's diet. Our bodies burn carbohydrates for fuel. We also burn fat and protein; however, we have to convert them to carbohydrates first, which is more work for our body. Always aim for whole grain choices because they have more fiber and typically have less added sugar than their refined white counterparts. The night before a big competition, consider switching to low fiber such as white pasta with red sauce to avoid gastrointestinal distress.

**Beans and Legumes:** For vegetarians (or those who prefer to go meatless every once in a while), plant-based sources of protein are a must. These include soybeans (and tofu), lentils, peas, and all varieties of beans – black, pinto, white, and kidney. While they may not be as high in protein as animal sources, they have the benefits of no saturated fat and are also a good source of fiber, which helps to keep you fuller longer.

**Salmon:** Oily fish, like salmon, mackerel, and trout, are great sources of lean protein and omega-3 fatty acids, which help reduce inflammation that can damage athletic performance and contribute to chronic conditions like heart disease. Most experts agree that eating seafood twice a week (or about 8 oz. total) is a good amount to reap its anti-inflammatory benefits.

**Berries:** Antioxidants such as vitamins A, C, and E help protect against oxidative stress and free radicals that form in the body during strenuous physical activity. Berries are the best source with deep colors (blackberries, raspberries, blueberries) that will offer more phytochemicals and protective substances. Try to eat varying colors of berries to ensure a wide variety of antioxidants and phytonutrients.

**Quinoa:** Although a sprouted seed, quinoa is considered a whole grain. It has nearly twice as much protein (8 grams per cup) as other grains, and it's one of the only foods to contain all nine essential amino acids that our bodies need to build lean muscle and recover from tough workouts. Furthermore, it's a great source of fiber and can be prepared in a variety of ways!

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