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Post-Exercise Nutrition for Optimal Recovery

When it comes to recovery after a workout, most athletes assume the best way to repair damaged tissue is to eat. While eating after a workout can restore glycogen stores and rebuild tissues for muscle growth, too much food or a little of the wrong foods may hinder your workouts.

Proper nutrition:

Research shows that combining protein with carbohydrate in the two hours after exercise nearly doubles the insulin response, which results in more stored glycogen. The optimal carbohydrate to protein ratio for this effect is 4:1 (four grams of carbohydrate for every one gram of protein).

Some ideas of foods to consume after exercise: banana with peanut butter, cereal and milk, oatmeal with fruit and nuts, soup and crackers, yogurt and pretzels, and string cheese with pretzels or crackers.

Have a late game that leaves you feeling hungry and depleted, but don't want to scarf down a bunch of food right before bed? Try a glass of chocolate milk (which naturally contains a 4:1 ratio of carbs to protein), a small fruit smoothie, or a small bowl of cottage cheese with fruit to satisfy your hunger and refuel tired muscles during the night.

Hydration:

It is important to replace fluids after exercise. Although electrolytes are lost through sweat, skip the high-sugar sport drinks and choose water after a workout. In addition to 20-28 ounces of fluid for each hour of training, sip on a 24-ounce bottle of water within 15-30 minutes after exercise. As for obtaining necessary vitamins and minerals post-workout, choose a colorful meal, complete with protein and complex carbohydrates, and be sure to include plenty of fruits and vegetables in your diet on a daily basis. For workouts lasting more than two hours, be sure to drink water throughout the day to maintain and restore hydration status.

Next time you head home after a game or hard workout at the gym, be sure to reward your body with the best food possible to ensure a quick recovery. No workout is complete until you take the time to recover.