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The Daily Performance Diet



Winter athletes often participate in a variety of activities and sports year-round and are aware that the foods and fluids they crave and consume change with the seasons. Winter nutrition conjures up images of warm, comforting foods that fuel your fit body and provide nutrients that keep you healthy through the cold season. Whether you train and focus on your chosen winter sport year-round or switch into winter training mode with the onset of cold weather, your daily food intake directly impacts your energy levels, recovery from training, and overall good health.

DAILY FOOD AND FLUID CHOICES FOR OPTIMAL WINTER TRAINING

Whether you are an enthusiastic recreational participant or serious competitor preparing both indoors and outdoors, choosing the proper foods in the portions designed for your training program replaces the body fuel you burn during training and supplies the ingredients required to build strength and muscle. When you focus on optimal nutritional recovery from day to day, your efforts are rewarded when you arrive for a day on the slopes, snow, or ice in the best nutritional shape possible. When you are focused on winter train-

ing, you must meet the nutritional demands placed on your body in order to derive the maximum benefit from your exercise program.

Bodies trained and primed for winter sports also require premium fuel for staying healthy throughout the season. If you suffer from lackluster training days, injuries, and more than a fair share of colds, flu, and the various viral and respiratory infections that can plague winter, you may not be making the highest-quality fuel choices possible. When it comes to your daily diet, as a winter sport athlete you should focus on quality, variety, and balance in order to obtain the more than forty-five different nutrients required for optimal functioning in your body.

Quality, Variety, and Balance

Daily eating that places an emphasis on quality foods, variety, and balance of all food groups creates the panorama that is the big-picture focus of your winter training diet. Many categories of foods are complex and provide several nutrients that work in tandem with other food categories to keep your body well nourished and healthy. Eating a variety of food choices at meals and snacks throughout the day, and incorporating variety into your weekly grocery shopping, sets the stage for a quality training diet. Within each category of foods are nutrient-packed choices that are minimally processed, fresh, and wholesome (Table 1.1). It is best for your lasting good health that you avoid the highly processed foods so prevalent in the North American diet and eating environment.

Quality eating for training and good health takes knowledge and planning. Food groups provide a bird's-eye view of how you can balance your diet. Often foods are grouped under the three major categories of carbohydrate, protein, and fat content, as the proper balance of these nutrients is required for a winter sport athlete's optimal training and recovery.

TABLE 1.1 » BASIC TRAINING FOOD GROUPS

Carbohydrates	Proteins	Fats
Fruits and fruit juices	Fish	Nuts and seeds
Green vegetables	Poultry	Liquid oils
Starchy vegetables	Lean red meat	Avocado
Whole grains	Beans and lentils	
Cereals	Soy proteins	
Breads	Eggs	
	Skim milk and low-fat yogurt	
	Low-fat cheeses	

Every winter sport athlete has his or her own optimal combination of food groups that come together to produce a cutting-edge diet. Some individuals may choose to place a strong emphasis on their fruit and vegetable intake, especially for the excellent immune system boost provided by these foods. Other athletes may highlight plant protein sources and obtain most of their fat intake from nuts and seeds rather than oils, or they may or may not prefer to have a significant amount of dairy products in their diet.

While grouping and categorizing foods can be useful in planning a healthy winter sport diet, it can also be an oversimplification of what nutrients foods provide. For example, some oils are highly processed and make a very poor nutritional choice. Animal proteins can contain varying levels of fat, some much too high in fat to be a regular part of your diet, while skim milk and yogurt also contribute carbohydrate in addition to high-quality protein. Grains can be wholesome, high in fiber, and even provide small amounts of protein, or they can be highly processed and nutritionally very poor.

The next step in planning a healthy training diet is to look at some of the food choices available within each of these designated food groups, so that you can appreciate which choices are the most nutritious. How you portion and time these healthy foods is what distinguishes your winter sport nutrition diet from an everyday diet geared toward good health. Table 1.2 outlines functions and food sources of nutrients. More information on food portioning and timing in conjunction with your training program is provided in the subsequent chapters.

Drinking in the Fluid

Water: The First Nutrient

With the arrival of cold weather, many athletes are often not as focused on daily hydration as they prepare for their training sessions. Much research and emphasis is placed on fluid intake directly before, during, and after training, but you shouldn't ignore your daily fluid intake at work, school, or rest either.

Fluid is the most essential nutrient for any athlete, including those participating in the cold outdoors and gym setting for winter sport training. Dehydration quickly results in adverse performance effects that are readily apparent and easily measured. While sweat losses of athletes competing in the cold outdoors are not always obvious to the eye, fluid losses during training, excursions, and competition taking place in colder temperatures can be significant enough to drag down your performance. Studies demonstrate that athletes competing even in thirst-inspiring hot weather routinely replace less fluid than is lost in sweat during training and especially during competition.

To obtain positive performance effects, adequate daily hydration is crucial for both general well-being and athletic performance, and every winter athlete should arrive for

TABLE 1.2 » NUTRIENTS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

Nutrient	Functions	Food Sources
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carries oxygen and nutrients to cells Plays a role in digestion Cools the body through sweat production Important role in many cellular processes Important part of muscle tissue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tap water Bottled water Fruit juices, dairy, and soy milk Solid foods that contain water: fruits, vegetables, yogurt
Carbohydrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary high-energy fuel source during exercise Replenishes body stores of carbohydrate Provides dietary fiber 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grains, breads, cereals, rice, pasta Fruit and fruit juices Vegetables Dairy and soy milk, yogurt
Protein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides essential amino acids Required for maintaining and developing muscle and other body tissue Essential component of enzymes, hormones, antibodies Needed for the formation of hemoglobin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meat, poultry, fish, cheese, eggs Soy, dried beans, lentils Dairy and soy milk, yogurt
Fat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides essential fatty acids Provides fat-soluble vitamins Adds flavor to foods Used as a fuel source Protects and insulates body organs Component of cell structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liquid oils Margarine and butter Nuts and seeds Avocado Fish
Vitamins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance energy production Involved in tissue repair and protein synthesis Role in red blood cell formation Act as antioxidants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fruits and vegetables Lean protein foods Whole grains Nuts and seeds
Minerals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involved in energy production Role in building body tissue Play role in muscle contraction Involved in oxygen transport Maintain acid-base balance of blood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fruits and vegetables Lean proteins Whole grains Nuts and seeds