

# NUTRIGRAM

September 2007

## EAT TO COMPETE

Amino acids for muscle strength, nutrition bars for energy, caffeine pills to burn fat...there are a lot of products that claim to give you an edge when competing in sports, but how do you know what works? While there are a lot of unproven products marketed as sports nutrition solutions, the one proven way to improve athletic performance is to eat in a way that supports your activity. This means focusing not only on what you eat, but when you eat.

### WHAT TO EAT?

Despite what you may hear, a healthy diet for an athlete is very similar to a healthy diet for a less active person. The difference is that active people will use more energy and therefore need more food. Carbohydrates are the preferred fuel source for exercise, so they should make up the largest part of an athlete's diet. Athletes involved in strength sports will need a little more protein. The average American diet, however, is typically much higher in protein than is needed, so it is usually not necessary to focus on eating more protein. Fat needs are basically the same for athletes as for less active people. Eating a variety of foods should provide enough nutrients for even the most active athlete. Before taking any supplements speak to your doctor or dietitian.

### WHEN TO EAT?

Eating consistently throughout the day and not skipping meals is important for overall health, but is especially crucial for athletes. Eating too close to event time can cause nausea, while eating too long before an event can leave you without enough energy to compete. Refueling your muscles after an event with a post-event meal is also key to staying on top of your game.

- ▶ Pre-event meals should be eaten 2-3 hours before athletic activity. Good choices are low in fat and fiber and high in carbohydrates with moderate amounts of protein.
- ▶ Post-event meals should be eaten within 30 minutes of finishing the activity. They should contain carbohydrates to replenish energy stores in the recently worked muscles. If you can only have a small snack right away, be sure to have a good meal within 2 hours.

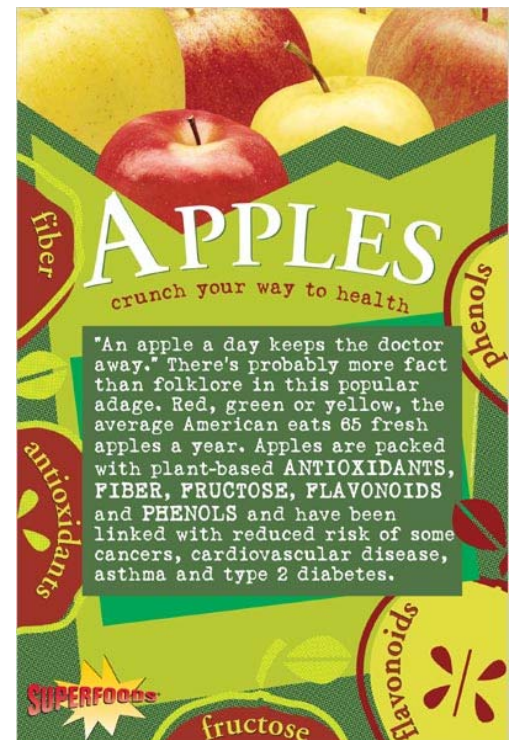
### WHAT ABOUT DRINKS?

Staying hydrated is essential to athletic performance. Thirst is usually not a good indicator of hydration, so it is important to drink throughout the day. Fluids should also be included in pre- and post-event meals as well as during competition. Water is a good choice for most exercise, but for events lasting longer than an hour a sports drink that contains some carbohydrates and electrolytes may be more effective. Avoid energy drinks during exercise as they usually contain a lot of caffeine and too much sugar—both which can cause problems during exercise.



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