EAT 4 FITNESS

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ARTICLES

PROTEIN-BETTER THAN CARBS?

By Sunny Blende, Sports Nutritionist

Better than carbs? No, different from carbs. While carbohydrates are needed by the brain and muscles for quick fuel, proteins are the brain and muscle. They make up many tissues and organs as well as carry oxygen in red blood cells and provide your immune system with defenses against bacteria and viruses. In fact, protein makes up one fifth of your body weight and you need a constant supply in order to build, replace and repair your bodies components. Think of your body as a car; how far would you get if you never replaced the battery, brakes or tires? All the gasoline in the world wouldn't help. So, while carbohydrate loading is great strategy for an athlete, make sure your bodies' machinery is tuned up too.

SIGNS OF TOO LITTLE PROTEIN

Proteins are made up of strings of amino acids and in order for these proteins to function properly, your body must continually add and recycle amino acids, building them into new proteins to replace and rebuild damaged ones. If your bodies' supply falls short of what it requires, your health suffers. You may have chronic fatigue, muscle loss, increased appetite, increased injuries or it may take longer to recover from your workouts and burn out follows. Dieting, increased training and an exclusively vegetarian diet may add to your risk for inadequate protein.

HOW MUCH?

Regular exercisers require more protein than the .4 grams per pound of body weight required by sedentary people. Muscle damage caused by hard work outs means you need more protein for repair. Strength training requires more to support the increased muscle mass. And during endurance activities or exercise where muscle glycogen (carbs) run low (or out), protein can be used as an alternate fuel source, although this should only be a last resort. There is still a lot of debate on how much an athlete needs to boost his or her protein consumption, but a safe recommendation is to get between .6 and 1.0 grams per pound of body weight per day, depending on how much endurance or weight lifting you do. For the average master athlete working out three to four times per week and weighing 150 pounds, this would mean about 75 grams of protein per day. Add more for additional workouts, especially weight sessions.

TIPS FOR GETTING ENOUGH

Low fat sources such as egg whites, fish, turkey, chicken, lean beef and low fat dairy products are the easiest to consume to meet your protein needs without being packed with artery clogging saturated fats. Although not all your protein sources have to come from animals, it is easier to meet your protein needs this way. Remember, the more vegetarian your diet is, the more careful you need to be in your food choices to meet your protein needs. And you will especially need to manage your iron, vitamin B 12 and calcium requirements. Try using more legumes (especially soybeans), tofu, low-fat yogurt and nuts and seeds.

Because protein requires less insulin for absorption than carbohydrates, spreading your intake of protein over all your meals and snacks will maintain your blood sugar throughout the day. This translates out to more even energy and decreases your risk of becoming insulin resistant.

Try the following for Protein Power:

Animal Sources
1 cup low-fat cottage cheese=28 grams
3 oz. skinless chicken breast=26 grams
3 oz. lean beef round=24 grams
3 oz. tuna packed in water=22 grams
1 cup fat-free yogurt=13 grams
1 cup skim milk=8 grams
1 egg white=4 grams (whole egg=6 grams)

Vegetable Sources
1 cup lentils=18 grams
1 cup fat-free refried beans=16 grams
1/2 cup tofu-=10 grams
2 Tbsp. peanut butter-=8 grams
1 cup soy milk=7 grams
1 cup brown rice=5 grams
1/4 cup sunflower seeds=8 grams
1/3 cup nuts=8 grams