

Summer Six Pack

By Todd Wilson Originally published - Issue 7 - April 1, 2002 © Iron Magazine Online L.L.C.

By a show of hands, how many of you have stuck to your New Year's resolutions? Now between the two of you, which one has achieved their goal? Ok, so we're back at square one. The number one New Year's resolution on an annual basis without question is to lose weight, get that "six pack", get ready for Spring Break, or summer, etc. Even among bodybuilders and strength athletes the goal of getting ripped often interferes with other goals of gaining strength and mass. Granted some athletes with higher body fat percentages have accepted that for their sport, they don't have to necessarily look good to perform well, therefore they could care less if they don't sport a ripped six pack. Another reason that they often carry extra weight is that through various diets that they've tried in the past they have indeed lost weight, but it has been just that, WEIGHT! It's my opinion that you should never attempt to lose "weight," it is much better to attempt to lose body fat. These reason being is the "weight" includes muscle too!

On the other side of the coin you most often have little skinny guys who play high school football, who want to get ripped like the guys in the magazines. Well, there is a little difference between the guys in magazines and skinny high schoolers (other than "mexican vitamins"); it's muscle. You have to have something to ripp! Often these trainees (and no, they aren't necessarily limited to younger guys, but that is where I see this mistake most often) have no clear-cut goals, nor a clear-cut plan. They want an extra 20 lbs. of muscle but they also want to drop from their present body fat percentage of 12 (which isn't that bad) to down around 4; all while adding slabs of meat. I am a firm believer that you can indeed add muscle while losing fat, but you also have to be realistic.

In the bodybuilding community in the last 10 years or so, low carb diets have become all the rage. Once deemed "fad" diets by experts, "dieticians," and doctors among others, the results cannot be denied. In the last 5 years or so with more and more athletes from other sports utilizing low carb approaches with attention to things like essential fatty acids and insulin response, the medical and academic communities have sat up and taken notice. In virtually every conference within the last 2-3 years on performance enhancement for athletes, nutrition, and varied fields of study and research low carbohydrate diets are being discussed, studied, and are finally being recognized as worthy options in the fight for not only performance enhancement, but against obesity.

Virtually every housewife, soccer mom, and computer cubicle warrior is on some type of low, no, or reduced carb diet. You have your Sugar Busters, your Zoners, your Atkin's apostles, Your Body for Lifers, etc., etc. It's literally popular now to be on some type of low carb diet. In the 80's and early 90's counting fat grams was the big thing, but in the 21st century we're counting carbs! And those smart ones among us are watching the type of carb.

A Calorie is a Calorie is a...

This is often what is espoused by the "experts" in the field of nutrition, namely dieticians. It is often overstated as a fact when someone mentions using a high protein diet. In other words, by eating excess protein, you will simply gain fat as a result because a calorie is a calorie. Well it's not quite that simple. Protein is the red-headed step child of the macronutrients. It does not behave like fat or carbohydrates. For one, it's the compound behind such things as protein synthesis. It's responsible for growth and repair of body tissues, it's the structural component of enzyme's, many hormones and hemoglobin, and is responsible for normal blood osmotic pressure. It can be used as fuel (i.e., it is broken down into a sugar), or stored as fat, but it isn't necessarily used in either of those ways. That's just a possibility. Also, while excess protein can be stored as fat, it is not as readily stored as fat as excess carbohydrate consumption.

Now, when people start talking about increased protein consumption, the question always comes up, "What about your kidney health?" Well, what about it? If you know of someone who died of a protein overdose raise your hand. Yeah, that's what I thought. From a clinical standpoint "stress" on the kidney's because of protein consumption is only seen in patients with a kidney disorder, and it can be seen during even relatively small amounts of protein consumption. Understand that the organ isn't working properly, hence the problem. For a fully functioning kidney...bring it own, it can take it! There are no studies linking high protein intake with kidney disease or dysfunction and on top of that you have the empirical evidence from bodybuilders and strength athletes from around the world, over the last 50 years who know the importance of a high protein diet. If high protein consumption caused health problems, we would know about it by now.

As for carbs... we have good carbs and bad carbs. Carbs found in twinkies and ding-dongs are bad carbs. Carbs found in fruit and vegetables are good carbs. Well, what, bread and pasta? Well, for one, they are very calorically dense. Secondly, they have a high glycemic index and are typically eaten in large amounts. This creates a greater insulin response.

What is an insulin response? Well, from a performance nutrition standpoint, it's about the most important thing in the world. This article does not lend itself to a full explanation of how to get insulin to work for you instead of against you but, maybe I can discuss that some other time. However, I will say that you can have a more favorable insulin response with most meals if you consume some protein every time you eat. In other words, no snacking on "fat free" pretzels. Yeah, their fat free, but that doesn't mean that the body can't store the energy derived from them from fat. Also, pretzels have an incredible insulin response. This is not good considering that few people have a metabolism fast enough to utilize all the sugar from a pretzel without going and exercising after eating it. In other words, if your eating pretzels while watching soap operas you are not expending enough energy to use all of the calories that you are absorbing. So, where do they go? Well, all of that extra insulin is trying to shove them into muscle cells to be used as energy. The problem is that when the cells are full, it stores the sugar as fat. So much for "fat free" food huh?

Now what about fat? Well, similar to the topic of insulin, it's too complex to get into for now. Suffice it to say, for the diet that I will propose in a moment, don't worry about it. Don't start eating butter sticks like candy bars but eat anything that isn't on "the list." Moderation in all things, in other words. I will say that I am a big believer in "good fats." I strongly recommend (on any diet) that one get 6-15 grams of essential oils every day. My favorite is fish oils, but flax seed, Udo's choice, CLA, etc. will do.

Ok, so much for the crash course in nutrition, how do you get a six pack this summer? Well, if your 5'6" 285lbs. FORGET IT! But, if you only have one chin and don't suffer from Dickey-Do disease, then I may can help with the following suggestions. These recommendations are based on "typical" American diets; people in other countries don't eat nearly the amount of fried foods or processed foods that we do. So on this Summer Six Pack diet, I recommend quite simply that for 6-12 weeks, you do not eat the following foods. Anything else is fair game, yes even butter!

You May Not Eat:

1. Fried Foods
2. Pasta (I know, I like Lasagna too)
3. Potatoes (This includes all forms: fries, chips, baked, etc. I will allow sweet potatoes however)
4. Bread (This is the biggy! And yes, it is hard to go without bread, not only because it taste good, but it's convenient if you eat out a lot. But if you can suck it up for a few weeks, you'll be surprised at the results. If you just can't handle it, then at least limit yourself to a certain amount each day. For example ONLY two slices of bread, or, ONLY one dinner roll, etc. Also, realize that cakes, cookies, pies with crust, etc., all qualify as breads).
5. Fruit juice/Kool Aid (The only time this is allowed is if you use it in your post exercise shake.)
6. Soft Drinks and Sweet Tea (The only soft drinks you can have are the diet variety. As for Sweet tea, it's more prevalent down here in the South, than other parts of the country, but it's still a bad way to get calories. Get non-sweet tea and add artificial sweetener, or better yet get some water.)
7. Junk food! (This sorta goes without saying, but I don't want someone emailing me saying the diet didn't work then telling me that they ate Snickers for lunch everyday.
8. Beer/alcohol consumption (a glass of wine with dinner is permissible, but a case of \$10.99 Natural Light won't cut it. No drinking games, no shot contest, etc.)

Now, that's just 8 little things, but as you've probably already realized, that makes up a lot of many peoples' daily caloric intake. So how do you make those calories up? Eat more of the stuff that is allowed; namely, meats, fruits and vegetables. The stuff your mom tried to tell you would make you big and strong. What can you drink? Milk, water, non-sweet tea, uhhh that may be it unless you can think of something else.

Give the above recommendations a try and you may be surprised at the results. I'm betting many will be forced to have better nutritional habits by cutting out those types of foods I listed. Be sure you're getting plenty of protein. I recommend 1-1.25 gram/lb. of bodyweight for general health. If you're training hard, and especially if you want to get bigger, get 1.5 to 2.0 grams/lb. Some other general guidelines: If you eat, make sure you eat it with some protein preferably at least 20 grams. Don't eat high glycemic fruits late at night. Grapes, bananas, pineapples, and most "mushy" fruits qualify. Eat an apple or orange. Eat enough! If you need 3,000 calories a day to maintain your weight, make sure you get at least that. By taking away major calorie sources people will often unknowingly under eat. Because this may alter your diet significantly, a good multi vitamin is probably a good idea, just to make sure you're getting enough of everything. I also recommend supplementing with Vitamin C. 3-10 grams a day is ideal for most people. To determine how much you need, use the bowel tolerance test. When your stomach says that's enough, you'll know so just back off 1-2 grams. However, you can build up over time. Generally speaking though, volume and frequency of exercise determines how much you need.

That's it! Maybe if I meet any of you this summer we can compare external oblique striations. I didn't give any workout recommendations per se, but frankly I feel this diet can work with any type workout whether it is designed to build strength, muscle, or cut fat. The key here is manipulating caloric intake via the allowed foods. There really isn't anything magical about it, I'm basically just telling you not to eat too much crap. It's not necessarily low carb, but frankly your body isn't going to allow you to eat too many fruits and vegetables. Therefore, you will have to eat a lot of dead animal, and again, don't be afraid of fats, they aren't all that bad. Anyway, I hope it works for you and let me know how it works, good or bad! Good luck!

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