

COMMON SENSE NUTRITION, PART 1

BY KIM BAUGHER

DOES IT SEEM LIKE NUTRITION CAN BE CONFUSING? IT'S NO WONDER, CONSIDERING ALL THE DIFFERENT SOURCES OF NUTRITIONAL ADVICE. MANY DIETS HAVE EMERGED OVER THE YEARS PROMISING TO HELP PEOPLE LOSE FAT, OR PUT ON MUSCLE, OR DO BOTH AT THE SAME TIME. OFTEN THESE DIETS WILL CREDIT SOME MAGICAL FOOD - ANYONE REMEMBER THE GRAPEFRUIT DIET? OTHERS LABEL A PARTICULAR MACRONUTRIENT AS EVIL, SUCH AS THE LOW FAT CRAZE OF THE 80'S AND THE RE-EMERGENCE OF LOW CARB DIETS SUCH AS ATKINS. WHILE PEOPLE HAVE OBVIOUSLY HAD SUCCESS WITH SOME OF THESE APPROACHES, I THINK THEY CAN BE UNNECESSARILY COMPLICATED AND TEND TO MISS THE BIG PICTURE.

THE BIGGEST FACTOR IN LOSING FAT IS REDUCING YOUR CALORIC INTAKE. ACCORDING TO THE LAW OF THERMODYNAMICS, ENERGY IN - ENERGY OUT = ENERGY DEFICIT OR SURPLUS. IT'S SIMPLE PHYSICS. UNFORTUNATELY, YOU'D HAVE TO JOG FOR A LONG TIME TO MAKE UP FOR THAT PINT OF BEN AND JERRY'S YOU ATE LAST NIGHT. EXERCISE IS OBVIOUSLY IMPORTANT WHEN TRYING TO LOSING FAT, BUT EATING LESS CALORIES IS EVEN MORE SO. DOES THIS MEAN THAT YOU HAVE TO STARVE YOURSELF? NO. WHAT YOU SHOULD DO IS MAKE INTELLIGENT FOOD CHOICES. THIS IN TURN WILL ALLOW YOU TO ENJOY EATING WHILE LEANING UP. BEING A LITTLE HUNGRY WHEN DIETING IS INEVITABLE, BUT THERE'S NO REASON TO TORTURE YOURSELF.

CONVERSELY, THE BIGGEST FACTOR IN PUTTING ON MUSCLE IS TO INCREASE CALORIES. YOU HAVE TO TAKE IN MORE THAN YOU'RE BURNING OFF. IT'S EASY TO SAY, "YOU JUST NEED TO EAT MORE." BUT FOR THOSE WHO HAVE TROUBLE PUTTING ON WEIGHT IT'S A LOT HARDER THAN IT SOUNDS. SO DO YOU NEED TO STUFF YOURSELF UNTIL YOU FEEL LIKE PUKING? NO. AGAIN, I THINK INTELLIGENT FOOD CHOICES CAN MAKE THINGS A LOT EASIER FOR YOU.

EAT YOUR FRUITS AND VEGGIES

FRUITS AND VEGGIES SHOULD MAKE UP THE BASE OF YOUR DIET. WHY? FIRST AND FOREMOST, VEGETABLES AND FRUITS CONTAIN LOTS OF GREAT NUTRIENTS SUCH AS VITAMINS, MINERALS, FIBER, PHYTONUTRIENTS, AND FLAVANOIDS WHICH MAY BE IMPORTANT FOR HEALTH. THEY'RE ALSO A GOOD SOURCE OF WATER, WHICH IS SOMETHING WE CAN ALL USE MORE OF. BECAUSE MANY FRUITS AND VEGETABLES ARE LOW GLYCEMIC THEY PROVIDE FOR EVEN LEVELS OF BLOOD SUGAR AND WILL GIVE YOU THE ENERGY YOU NEED FOR LONGER PERIODS OF TIME.

GREEN LEAFY VEGETABLES ARE PARTICULARLY NUTRITIOUS, BUT DON'T LIMIT YOURSELF HERE. A GOOD RULE OF THUMB IS TO INCLUDE VARIOUS COLORS OF VEGETABLES - RED, GREEN, ORANGE, ETC. THIS WILL ENSURE THAT YOU'RE GETTING A GOOD VARIETY, NOT TO MENTION THAT IT WILL MAKE THINGS A LITTLE MORE INTERESTING. EATING DOESN'T AND SHOULDN'T HAVE TO BE BORING.

COMMON ADVICE, ESPECIALLY IN THIS AGE OF LOW CARB DIETING, IS TO ELIMINATE INTAKE OF STARCHY VEGETABLES IN ORDER TO LOSE FAT. I THINK THIS IS FAIRLY GOOD ADVICE, AS STARCHY VEGETABLES TEND TO BE CALORICALLY DENSE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO ELIMINATE THEM ENTIRELY, HOWEVER. A FEW THINGS YOU CAN DO ARE TO LIMIT THEIR INTAKE TO TIMES WHEN YOUR BODY CAN BETTER TOLERATE THEM, SUCH AS IN THE MORNING OR IN THE MEAL AFTER TRAINING WHEN INSULIN SENSITIVITY IS HIGHER. ANOTHER OPTION IS TO GO FOR A LOWER-GLYCEMIC ALTERNATIVE LIKE SWEET POTATOES, OR A LOWER CALORIE ALTERNATIVE LIKE MASHED CAULIFLOWER. ALSO, LEAVE THE PEEL ON - IT'S A GOOD SOURCE OF FIBER AND NUTRIENTS AND WILL HELP FILL YOU UP MORE. ON THE OTHER HAND, ATHLETES ATTEMPTING TO GAIN WEIGHT MAY WANT TO TAKE IN STARCHIER VEGETABLES IN FAVOR OF OTHER KINDS. HOWEVER, THEY SHOULDN'T NEGLECT OTHER SORTS OF VEGETABLES BECAUSE THEY'D BE MISSING OUT ON A LOT OF GOOD NUTRIENTS.

MORE COMMON ADVICE FOR LOSING WEIGHT IS TO ELIMINATE FRUIT FROM YOUR DIET DUE TO ITS FRUCTOSE CONTENT. I THINK THIS IS A BIG MISTAKE. MANY FRUITS, PARTICULARLY NORTHERN FRUITS, ARE VERY LOW IN CALORIES AND ARE MADE UP OF MOSTLY WATER AND FIBER. EATING A PIECE OF FRUIT CAN HELP SATISFY YOUR SWEET TOOTH, AND SO YOU'LL BE LESS LIKELY TO EAT SOMETHING YOU SHOULDN'T. ALSO, THE FIBER IN PIECE OF FRUIT BEFORE A MEAL CAN HELP FILL YOU UP AND KEEP YOU FROM PIGGING OUT. I DON'T KNOW ANYONE WHO'S GOTTEN FAT FROM EATING APPLES!

SWEETER TROPICAL FRUITS DON'T HAVE TO BE ELIMINATED, BUT STICK TO EATING THEM AT TIMES WHEN YOU WOULD EAT STARCHY VEGETABLES (I.E. IN THE MORNING AND AFTER A WORKOUT).

HOW ABOUT GRAINS?

I NORMALLY RECOMMEND THAT ATHLETES LOOK TO FRUITS AND VEGETABLES FIRST FOR THEIR CARBOHYDRATE NEEDS. GRAINS CAN ALSO BE AN EXCELLENT SOURCE OF CARBOHYDRATES, BUT I LIKE THEM TO TAKE A BACK SEAT TO FRUITS AND VEGETABLES FOR A FEW REASONS. MANY GRAIN PRODUCTS ARE PROCESSED, WHICH MEANS THEY'VE BEEN ALTERED IN SOME WAY OR ANOTHER. EVEN GRAINS THAT WE NORMALLY THINK OF AS BEING UNPROCESSED, SUCH AS OATMEAL, ARE TYPICALLY FLATTENED (ROLLED) AND PRE-COOKED TO PROVIDE FOR SHORTER COOKING TIMES. PROCESSED FOODS REQUIRE LESS WORK ON YOUR PART TO EAT AND DIGEST, AND HIGHLY PROCESSED FOODS ALSO TEND TO HAVE HIGH GLYCEMIC INDEXES - THAT IS, THEY CAN SPIKE BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS AND ENERGY LEVELS CAN BE UNEVEN AS A RESULT. FURTHERMORE, HIGHLY PROCESSED GRAIN PRODUCTS TEND TO BE VERY CALORICALLY DENSE, AND SO IT'S EASY TO EAT TOO MUCH. FINALLY, HIGHLY PROCESSED GRAIN PRODUCTS LACK THE NUTRIENTS THAT THE LESS PROCESSED ONES DO. INCLUDING GRAINS IN YOUR DIET CAN BE A GOOD IDEA WHEN YOU INCLUDE THE RIGHT TYPES AND EAT THE

ATHLETES ATTEMPTING TO LEAN UP SHOULD TAKE IN GRAINS THAT HAVE BEEN PROCESSED AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE. STEEL-CUT OATS, SCOTTISH OR IRISH STYLE OATS, MILLET, AND SPROUTED GRAIN BREADS ARE ALL GOOD CHOICES. THE BEST TIMES TO EAT THESE TYPES OF GRAINS ARE BEFORE OR AFTER ONE'S WORKOUT.

EAT YOUR CRITTERS

AS MOST ATHLETES KNOW, ESPECIALLY STRENGTH ATHLETES, PROTEIN IS ALSO VERY IMPORTANT. THE AMINO ACIDS FROM PROTEIN PROVIDE THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR MUSCLE, BUT THEY'RE ALSO USED FOR BUILDING OTHER STRUCTURES IN THE BODY AND ARE IMPORTANT IN OTHER FUNCTIONS.

THE BEST SOURCES OF PROTEIN ARE LEAN MEATS (E.G. CHICKEN, TURKEY, FISH, BUFFALO, VENISON, OSTRICH) AND FATTY COLD WATER FISH (E.G. WILD SALMON). THIS ISN'T TO SAY THAT YOU SHOULDN'T EAT STEAK. HOWEVER, FATTIER MEATS TEND TO BE HIGHER IN LEVELS OF OMEGA-6 FATTY ACIDS (AN EXCEPTION TO THIS IS GRASS FED BEEF, OR MEAT OBTAINED FROM WILD GAME, WHICH TEND TO BE HIGHER IN OMEGA-3'S). WHILE OMEGA-6'S ARE IMPORTANT, WE AS A SOCIETY TEND TO GET WAY TOO MANY OF THESE IN OUR DIETS ALREADY AND TOO FEW OMEGA-3'S. LIMITING INTAKE OF THESE WHILE INCREASING INTAKE OF SOURCES OF OMEGA-3'S (SUCH AS COLD WATER FISH) WILL HELP BALANCE YOUR INTAKE OUT. ALSO, EATING LEAN MEATS ALLOWS YOU TO CONTROL YOUR INTAKE OF FATS BY GETTING THEM FROM OTHER SOURCES.

SPEAKING OF FAT...

FAT IS ALSO AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR DIET AND SHOULD NOT BE NEGLECTED. FAT IS UTILIZED BY YOUR BODY FOR THE PRODUCTION OF HORMONES AMONG VARIOUS OTHER FUNCTIONS. AND WHILE FAT IS CALORICALLY DENSE - 9 CALORIES PER GRAM OF FAT - THE NOTION THAT TAKING IN FAT WILL AUTOMATICALLY INCREASE YOUR WAISTLINE IS FALSE. IN FACT, ATHLETES WHO ARE ATTEMPTING TO PUT ON WEIGHT MAY WANT TO INCREASE THEIR FAT INTAKE AS AN EASY WAY TO INCREASE THEIR CALORIES. OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS CAN NOT ONLY HELP YOUR BODY UTILIZE NUTRIENTS BETTER (AND IN TURN HELP ONE LOSE WEIGHT), BUT CAN ALSO HELP ALLEVIATE SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION, CAN REDUCE INFLAMMATION, AND HAVE SO MANY OTHER HEALTH BENEFITS THAT IT WOULD REQUIRE A WHOLE ARTICLE JUST TO MENTION THEM. FAT PROVIDES SATIETY AND CAN HELP KEEP YOU FULLER FOR LONGER

- IN MY OPINION THIS IS THE MAIN REASON WHY LOW CARB DIETS ARE SO SUCCESSFUL WITH MANY PEOPLE.

OLIVE OIL, NUTS, COLD WATER FISH AND EGGS ARE ALL GOOD SOURCES OF HEALTHY FATS. ATHLETES WISHING TO RESTRICT THEIR CALORIES SHOULD STILL TAKE IN FATS FROM SOME SOURCE, BUT BE CAREFUL, PARTICULARLY WITH NUTS AND NUT BUTTERS - IT IS VERY EASY TO EAT A LOT OF THIS AND IN TURN TAKE IN TOO MANY CALORIES. ALSO BE SURE TO TAKE IN FAT FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES, AS VARIOUS KINDS OF FAT (MONOUNSATURATED, POLYUNSATURATED, AND EVEN SATURATED) HAVE DIFFERENT BENEFITS. AVOID FATS CONTAINING TRANS-FATTY ACIDS, HOWEVER.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

SO, TO SUMMARIZE...

FOR ATHLETES ATTEMPTING TO LOSE WEIGHT:

-THE BASE OF YOUR DIET SHOULD BE MADE UP OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES. THE MAJORITY OF THIS SHOULD BE MADE UP OF GREEN LEAFY VEGETABLES AND NORTHERN FRUITS AS THEY ARE MORE FILLING BECAUSE THEY CONTAIN MORE FIBER AND WATER. STARCHY VEGETABLES AND TROPICAL FRUITS CAN BE INCLUDED, BUT DO SO SPARINGLY AND AT APPROPRIATE TIMES.

-IF YOU NEED HELP MEETING YOUR ENERGY REQUIREMENTS, GRAINS CAN ALSO BE INCLUDED, BUT DO SO AT THE APPROPRIATE TIMES (IN THE MORNINGS AND BEFORE/AFTER A WORKOUT).

-PROTEIN REQUIREMENTS SHOULD BE MET BY TAKING IN LEAN MEATS AND COLD WATER FISH. FATTIER CUTS OF MEAT CAN BE INCLUDED BUT LIMIT YOUR INTAKE OF THESE IN FAVOR OF THE FORMER SOURCES MENTIONED.

-FATS SHOULD NOT BE NEGLECTED AS THEY CAN PROVIDE SATIETY AND ARE UTILIZED FOR VARIOUS FUNCTIONS IN THE BODY. CERTAIN KINDS ALSO PROVIDE NUMEROUS HEALTH BENEFITS AND CAN ACTUALLY HELP FACILITATE WEIGHT LOSS. BE CAREFUL NOT TO OVERDO IT, THOUGH.

FOR ATHLETES ATTEMPTING TO GAIN WEIGHT:

-THE BASE OF YOUR DIET SHOULD BE MADE UP OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES. THE MAJORITY OF THIS SHOULD BE MADE UP OF STARCHY VEGETABLES TO PROVIDE CALORIES, BUT OTHER VEGETABLES AND FRUIT SHOULD NOT BE NEGLECTED BECAUSE OF THEIR NUTRIENT CONTENT.

-GRAINS CAN ALSO BE INCLUDED IN THE DIET AND CAN PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT SOURCE OF ENERGY, BUT ATTEMPT TO TAKE IN MOST OF YOUR CALORIES FROM MINIMALLY PROCESSED SOURCES. THIS WILL PROVIDE FOR EVEN BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS AND IN TURN LONGER LEVELS OF ENERGY.

-PROTEIN REQUIREMENTS SHOULD BE MET BY TAKING IN LEAN MEATS AND COLD WATER FISH. FATTIER CUTS OF MEAT CAN BE INCLUDED BUT LIMIT YOUR INTAKE OF THESE IN FAVOR OF THE FORMER SOURCES MENTIONED.

-FATS CAN PROVIDE FOR A DENSE SOURCE OF CALORIES AND CAN HELP YOUR MEET YOUR CALORIC REQUIREMENTS. CERTAIN KINDS ALSO PROVIDE NUMEROUS HEALTH BENEFITS AND CAN ACTUALLY HELP FACILITATE BETTER UTILIZATION OF NUTRIENTS.

SO, THERE YOU GO. IN PART 2 OF THIS SERIES I'LL DISCUSS NUTRIENT TIMING AND GO INTO MORE DETAIL ABOUT HOW THE TYPES OF FOOD YOU EAT CAN EFFECT WEIGHT LOSS.