



NUTRITION FOR PERFORMANCE

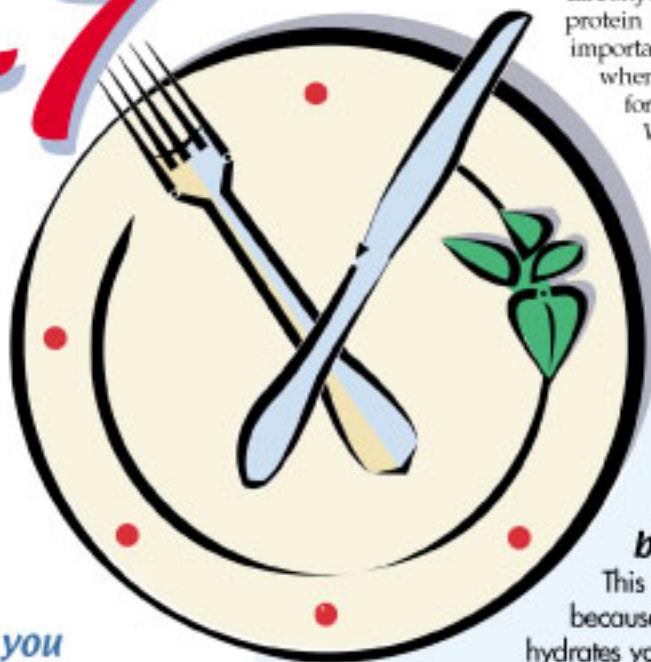
24-7

By Michelle Dusserre Farrell

For athletes of all types, training is serious business. Whether you are a Level 5 or an international elite level gymnast, thinking about gymnastics starts before you walk in the doors and put on your grips. Yet many athletes don't put much thought or effort into what makes them a "whole athlete." This includes mental preparation, rest, a healthy outlook on life and, of course, good nutrition. The tips below are not only good nutrition tips for gymnastics, but they are sensible guidelines to follow if you expect the best performance out of your body physically and mentally 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

BREAKFAST

Wake-up: Your body has been fasting for up to nine hours. The origin of the word breakfast stands for "breaking the fast." Start your morning off with a good breakfast that includes a good source of carbohydrates. Cereal, juice, toast, fruit, milk and rice (yes, rice), are all good choices to start the day. You should also include a protein source like eggs, but don't completely forget the carbohydrates. Your brain cannot use protein or fat for energy, and it's important to feed those brain cells when you first wake up! Don't forget, too, that your body needs WATER. Drink at least 8-12 oz of water before you head out the door.



TIP

Did you know that different carbohydrate-rich foods can cause different reactions in your blood sugar levels?

This is important to know because the kinds of carbohydrates you eat can affect your energy level. Foods with carbohydrates can be rated or judged by what is called Glycemic Index (GI). It is not important to remember what GI stands for, but it is important to understand what it does. Foods that make your blood sugar rise very quickly are rated as having a high glycemic index or GI. If your blood sugar rises quickly, this will cause a hormone called insulin to be released, and this hormone will lower your blood sugar levels very quickly. For some people they may end up feeling tired and sluggish. There are good and bad times to eat high GI foods. It is good to eat high GI foods after practice. This is because high GI foods will quickly restore the carbohydrate that you've used during practice. It is bad to eat these types of foods right before practice. Doing so may make you feel tired and sluggish. Below is a list of high, medium and low glycemic index foods. Try to eat high GI foods right after practice, and medium GI foods right before practice.

High GI foods

Bagels
Carrots
Table sugar
Potatoes

Medium GI foods

Raisins
Peas
Corn
Pasta

Low GI foods

Beans
Milk
Apples
Yogurt

LUNCH

If you have afternoon practice, what you eat is critical to how you'll feel once you hit the gym. Because you demand so much of your body, you have to pamper yourself with good healthy foods. Be selfish with your food choices. Picking fresh foods and staying away from foods that are processed are your best bet. Fresh foods come packed with the good stuff like vitamins, minerals and fiber. Processed foods usually have tons of preservatives, a lot of salt, very few vitamins and minerals, and they're usually loaded with saturated fats, which are not healthy for your heart.

Below are some better alternatives for some favorite processed foods:

Used to eating...

Potato chips
Processed turkey
Fruit roll-ups
Cookies
Packaged, low-fat snack foods
White bread

Try...

Popcorn
Tuna, tofu or chicken breast
Fresh fruit
Trail mix (raisins, nuts, seeds)
Bagels or yogurt
100% whole wheat bread

SNACK

Your body's blood sugar levels are probably starting to drop a little, and you might be hungry. This is a great time for a snack. If you're in school, try and pack something that is portable and easy to eat when you have a break. Fruit is nature's fast food! It is also packed with nutrients and fiber. For variety, always eat a snack that includes two foods from two different food groups. Remember, the more variety you have in your diet the more nutrients you'll eat (and the less boring your diet will be!)

Examples would be...

Apple and crackers with peanut butter
Cottage cheese and banana
Bagel and yogurt
Yogurt and raisins
Crackers and cheese
Tortilla with hummus

BODY BALANCE *continued from page 11*

Don't forget your fluids. Your body, by weight, is about 65-70% water. Your muscles by weight are almost 75% water. If you are thirsty, you are probably already dehydrated. Most gymnasts do not drink enough water during practice. You should try to drink 8 oz. of water at least for every hour of practice. The best way to measure is to fill your water bottle before practice with the amount of water you'll need.

How much you need depends on how long you practice. For example, if your practice is 3½ hours long...

$8 \text{ oz} \times 3.5 \text{ hours} = 28 \text{ oz of water}$

So make sure you drink your entire 28 oz water bottle by the end of practice.

DINNER

Remember, this is a good time to include foods out of that high glycemic index list. Your body is craving to replace the carbohydrates you just burned at practice. These high GI foods will replace that energy most effectively. Make sure you try and eat dinner as soon after practice as possible. Try to eat within 30 minutes of finishing practice, and no longer than 2 hours after practice—any longer and your body will have a harder time replacing that burned carbohydrate. Don't forget foods with protein, like chicken, fish, beef, milk, and eggs. A hard workout causes muscle tissue to break down, and a diet without enough protein will keep muscles from being properly rebuilt.

TIP

It is important to make good nutrition choices. But part of making

good choices and taking a healthy approach to eating is to treat nutrition like a marathon, not a sprint. Let's face it...we all have cravings for things that might be salty, sweet, and downright fattening. Many athletes mistakenly make what they think are "perfect" food choices. These choices, which tend to be no-fat, no sugar, low-calorie and not-much-of-anything-else, actually rob you of two things: foods that are packed with essential nutrients and foods that satisfy the cravings that we all have. If you make good, smart food choices 90% of the time, allow yourself during that other 10% of the time to indulge a little. This approach will take you much farther and create a healthier, long-term outlook to a balanced diet.