

Basic Nutrition

(Ron Jones, MS, ACSM Health/Fitness Instructor, Corporate Wellcoach)



WELLNESS: Before discussing basic nutrition, one needs to understand the concept of “Wellness.” Wellness is the balanced approach to staying healthy, or rather, a preventative health plan that helps to keep you from getting sick. For example, you can’t expect a good nutritional plan to work efficiently if you are neglecting regular exercise, etc. The basic components of Wellness are:

- Regular exercise
- Low-fat diet with balance, moderation, and variety
- Mental/Emotional health
- No smoking, drug, or alcohol abuse

** Think of each component as a spoke in a bicycle wheel; if you remove any one spoke the strength and integrity of the wheel becomes compromised and the wheel collapses under pressure. Your bodies are no different! Remove enough spokes and your body will fail whether you’re an athlete or just exercising for general fitness. You’re only as good as your health. Anyone who has lost their health will tell you it is more important than money, new cars, jewelry, or anything. **Having your health is quality living--don’t blow it!** ☺*

Tips for Healthy Eating

- **Eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day.**
- Eliminate **extra fat** as found in junk food, whole milk, and excessive cheese and dairy products. Did you know that whole milk is ≈54% fat and the 2% “low-fat” milk is really close to 40% saturated FAT--whoaaa, this is a lot of extra lard!
- ≈55-60% of your diet should be from carbohydrates like pasta, bread, legumes or beans, etc. (be careful of fatty pasta sauces loaded with cheese and sausage, etc.)
- Stay hydrated. Start your day with a glass of water. A simple rule for checking your hydration level--if your urine is clear, you’re hydrated. If urine is dark yellow, you’re dehydrated, so drink more water until it clears. Water is good for you and helps to purify your body and enables proper core temperature cooling which is essential for people who exercise. Note that diets high in fiber or excessive in protein intake require more water consumption.
- The meat you consume should be lean cuts. You should trim the excess fat off before and after cooking. Most Americans consume too much fat. Recommended daily fat intake is <30% of total calories.

Vitamins & Supplements

In theory, if you eat an optimal well-balanced diet everyday you’ll get nearly all of the vitamins and minerals you need to maintain an average healthy body. However, it is difficult for most of us to eat right even when we are trying hard to do so. It is always better to get vitamins and minerals from food, but if you are interested in vitamins to supplement your diet, try a multi-vitamin that gives you 100% of the Recommended Daily Intake (RDI) levels. Unless you’re very knowledgeable about nutritive supplements, stay away from the mega-dose vitamins because they can be dangerous. Use Wellness for optimal health instead of expensive and unnecessary supplements.

***Note:** *RDI recommendations are for an “average healthy individual.” Depending on one’s particular needs, supplementation requirements might need to be adjusted on an individual basis because of disease, competitive athletics, environmental conditions, etc.*

Calcium: Only 20-40% of the calcium you eat is absorbed into your body (“bioavailability”). The RDI is up to 1200 mg (depends on age & sex). Until the age of 20, you are adding bone mass so calcium is critical—especially for females. Calcium is also instrumental in the chemistry of muscle contractions. A calcium deficiency can cause cramping from involuntary contractions and lead to osteoporosis in both women *and men*.

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Fat

Note that earlier I cautioned you about **excess fats**--I do *not* recommend eliminating fat all together! Fat is very important to your metabolism for things like providing integrity to cellular structures, manufacturing hormones such as testosterone and estrogen, insulating sensitive organs, and providing an aerobic fuel source. ***DO NOT eliminate all fat** from your diets; I am suggesting that you only eliminate the *excess fat* beyond the recommended intake levels of <30% of total daily calories. However, there is hidden fat in many of the foods we consume. Please note that too low % of body fat will not only **DECREASE** ☹ exercise and athletic performance--but will endanger your health and maybe even your life! You optimize your performance with proper nutrition and scientific training--*not with eating disorders*.

Fiber

High-fiber diets are healthy. Always strive to eat foods with the least amount of refining possible. For example, whole wheat bread has more fiber than refined white bread. Fruits and vegetables are great sources of fiber. Try to eat both soluble fiber (fruits & veggies) and non-soluble fiber (fruits, veggies + wheat bran, etc.) as both are needed to promote healthy intestinal function. A major benefit of obtaining nutrients from fresh foods rather than supplements is that fresh foods are good sources of fiber while most supplements offer no fiber at all. Some people take special fiber supplements instead of eating fresh fruits and vegetables; however, these can cause serious problems if taken in excess. If your diet is Wellness oriented, then you'll get fiber from good nutritious and fiber-rich food and shouldn't need extra supplementation. Remember, high-fiber diets require extra water to ensure normal intestinal function.

"Nutrient Density" of Food

You should always attempt to eat food that is rich (dense) in nutrients as opposed to food that has a lot of calories but not many nutrients. Take the whole milk example: you can get the same amount of valuable nutrients drinking non-fat milk as you can from drinking the whole milk. There is only one MAJOR difference between the two--whole milk is ~54% fat and non-fat is 0% fat! Junk food and candy is the same story--these have loads of "caloric density" but very little, if any, "nutrient density" or value. By focusing on nutrient dense foods, you get all the good stuff without loading your body with excess fats and calories. People will be amazed at the amount of "healthy food" you can eat, but remember, this type of eating is low in calories from fat and high in nutrients that promote good health and maintenance of optimal body weight.

Health/Nutrition/Supplement-Related Weblinks

- www.5aday.com (National Cancer Institute)
- www.drkoop.com (By former US Surgeon General C. Everett Koop)
- www.goaskalice.columbia.edu (Columbia University's *Interactive Q&A Health Site*)
- www.justmove.org (American Heart Association's Fitness Site)
- www.nal.usda.gov/fnic (US Government's Food & Nutrition Info Council)
- www.nutrition.gov (US Government's Primary Nutrition Site)
- www.ronjones.org/Weblinks/index.htm (Ron Jones' Health & Fitness Weblinks)
- www.shapeup.org (Fitness site By former US Surgeon General C. Everett Koop)
- www.usda.gov/cnpp/pyrabklt.pdf (USDA Food Guide Pyramid On-Line Booklet)

The human body is the most amazing machine on our planet--give it a chance to perform with **"High-Performance Health" from Wellness**. Don't make the mistake of isolating only some of the "spokes in the wheel" while neglecting others. Take the **"balanced approach of Wellness"** and do everything right to promote the absolute highest level of health, which not only will add quality to your life, but also will enhance your exercise program or athletic performance as well.

Good luck, exercise smart, and be healthy! ☺

* Ron Jones (9.7.07)