



Nutrition for Gymnasts - 2

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This is the second Training Note that contains more information about ways for both parents and gymnasts to improve training and competition performance by eating the right foods.

Performance



To perform at your best during training and in competition, it is important that you eat and drink the right amount of nutrients - that is, the parts in food that keep your body healthy and help it to grow. If you do this, then you will increase the size and availability of food stores available to feed your activities and you will recover quicker.

Focus 1

The main focus is on carbohydrates. One way that your body stores carbohydrates is as muscle glycogen. This is the main source of energy for aerobic exercise. If you have low muscle glycogen, you will feel 'heavy' in your muscles and lacking in energy.

To ensure that you consume enough carbohydrates do not follow any of the 'fad' diets. You should be looking at consuming 5 - 10 grams of carbohydrates per kg of body weight each day. So if you weigh 70 kg then you need to eat between 350 to 700 grams of carbohydrates each day. For gymnasts training three or more times a week then the high end of the scale is best for you. Some good carbohydrate foods include a banana with a cup of yoghurt; two slices of bread with one or two cups of baked beans or spaghetti; one cup of pasta; one or two cups of a healthy breakfast cereal (muesli) with milk and fruit. Most of these serves will give you about 50 grams of carbohydrates, so you can see that you need to eat a lot of carbohydrates if you are really serious about your performance.



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Focus 2



The second focus is drinking water. Most people do not drink enough water, regardless of whether they exercise or not. You need to drink about eight glasses or two litres of water every day. If your urine is a pale yellow to clear in colour, then that is a good guide and you are probably drinking enough.

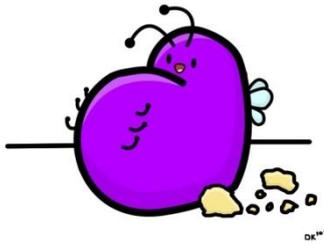
Focus 3

The third focus is on having a balanced diet. If you consume a balanced diet as per the Australian Government Dietary Guidelines, www.nhmrc.gov.au, that includes sufficient animal products, fruits, vegetables, etc. You need to include enough macronutrients (including protein) and micronutrients (including iron), both of which are vital for exercising and living properly. Your body does not like exercising if it cannot live well first.



It is important to note that you need to balance the amount that you eat with your energy needs.

Protein is also important to repair any muscle damage that occurs occasionally and iron is important to maintain the oxygen-carrying capacity of your cardiovascular system. Furthermore, fat and the rest of the micronutrients that we get in a balanced diet are imperative for a well-oiled human body and, therefore, a machine that works well under the pressure of exercise.



It is important to think about your portion size. We tend to ignore our bodies signals of hunger and satisfaction until we have eaten too much and are overfull.

Many people say they rarely feel hungry. Learn to recognise how it feels to be 'peckish', 'hungry', 'ravenous', or 'satisfied', 'full' and 'stuffed'. Perhaps imagine your stomach as a petrol tank with a gauge and aim for somewhere between quarter and half full. When you eat, think first about how much you really need to feel satisfied and how far away the next meal or snack is.

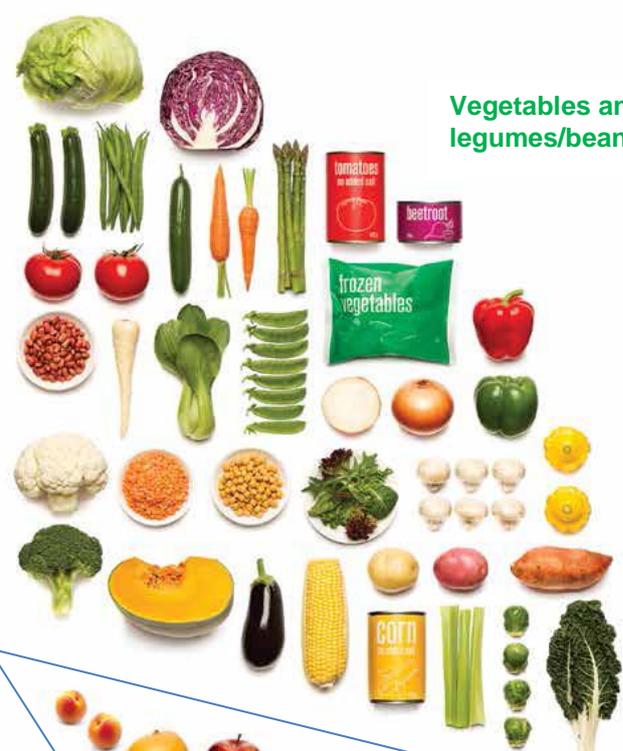
Eat slowly, 'mindfully' without distractions like TV and give your body time to give you feedback. Put your cutlery down between mouthfuls when you are chewing, or sip water in between swallows to slow your pace. Pace yourself with someone who eats slowly or time yourself so you eat less quickly. Concentrate on what a food looks like and, how it smells, tastes and feels in your mouth and stomach. By eating 'mindfully', you will enjoy food more and end up needing less to feel satisfied.

Portion size = 3 parts Cereal;
3 parts Vegetables: 1 part Meat;
1 part Milk + 1 part Fruit

Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties



Vegetables and legumes/beans



Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legumes/beans



Fruit



Do not forget WATER!



Milk, yogurt, cheeses, and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat