

WHAT IS EATING RIGHT?

by Rick Anderson

Part II of a Series

In my first article on nutrition I pointed out why the majority of athletes and coaches don't believe nutrition is really that important. I also emphasized that as an athlete reaches higher levels of strength, nutrition becomes much **more** important. Most importantly, I wanted to make young athletes and coaches aware that if an athlete wants to reach levels of strength and conditioning much closer to his real potential, attention to diet is an **absolute must**. The phrase I used in Article I which best sums up the value of nutrition is: "The better you want to be, the better you've got to eat."

Once an athlete makes the decision to eat better a whole new set of questions arise. The biggest question is, "What is eating right?" Answering this question can be very confusing for athletes. Nutrition is a very controversial subject. If you talk to 100 people who have interest in the nutrition field, you will probably get 100 different ideas. One person will tell you your diet should be high carbohydrate, low fat. Another person will say: high protein, low carbohydrate; another says no red meat and so on and so on. For example, I have a yoga master friend who is convinced meat in any form is absolute poison.

Some dietary ideas that a young athlete may be exposed to can even be downright dangerous, and bizarre beyond belief. In the upper echelon of powerlifting and bodybuilding circles some athletes will do **anything** to attain that slight edge in competition. Some of these athletes will eat the pituitary glands of gorillas, inject the urine of pregnant women or other even more insane things. With that kind of warped thinking floating around, coaches and athletes need nutritional ideas which are healthy, reasonable and can still help them achieve their goals.

It is my suggestion that several things should be kept in mind when making nutritional decisions. First, the diet should promote good general health. Second, the young athlete should eat to help him attain his goals. Third his diet should be practical and easy to stick with. I think a "middle of the road" philosophy is the best way to attain the above objectives.

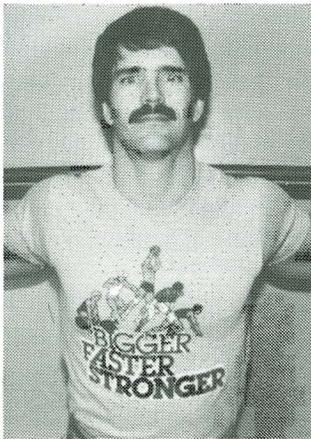
This philosophy is good news because I feel athletes and coaches already know how to eat properly. Mothers have been telling their children what to eat for years. "Eat your vegetables," "no dessert until you drink your milk," "take a bite of everything." This is all good advice. Almost all athletes know that they should eat something from each major food group every day. A balance of food from the meat group, the dairy and milk group, vegetable and fruit group and grain group according to many doctors and nutritionists is the most desirable diet plan. The vast majority of athletes can tell you exactly

what will give them good nutrition. They know, for example, that a salad is much better than a candy bar or a glass of milk is much better than a can of pop. The problem comes in applying what they already know. What Mom has told them may not be perfect (nobody knows what is), but by simply eating more of what is good and less of what is not very good, the general health and athletic performance of most athletes would improve greatly. The point I'm making is: Take what you know and start acting on it!

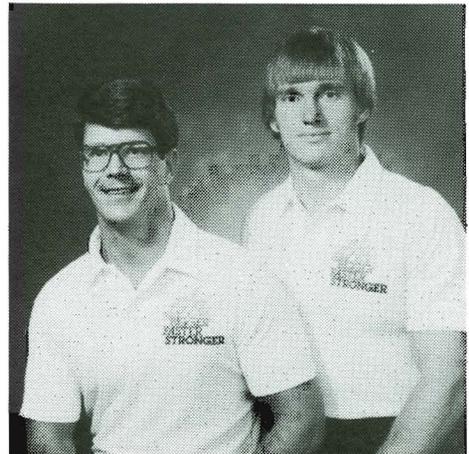
The well-balanced diet, in addition to keeping the athlete in good health, will help him in achieving his athletic goals. Combined with his training and proper rest, good nutrition replenishes the body's reserves of energy and produces an increase in lean muscle mass. Obviously, an athlete with high energy levels and larger, stronger muscles is going to perform better. Another element of nutrition needs to be added at this point. Many young athletes have reasonably well-balanced diets, but have a hard time gaining muscle tissue. The issue here is calories or "how much" the athlete eats as well as "what." Young growing athletes use up tremendous quantities of calories. Even if they "pig out" at every meal, they still don't gain much weight. These athletes are not getting enough calories to gain good functional body weight. To solve this problem, the athlete has got to eat more calories. Planning snacks is one way to solve this dilemma. A big carbohydrate and protein sandwich for snacks in-between meals and before bed, washed down with a big glass of milk helps many athletes. If this is impractical, an athlete may supplement his diet with a "weight gain" product also taken between meals and at night. It really doesn't make any difference how he does it, but more calories have got to be eaten.

The above is a great plan for your skinny kids but how about the over-fat athlete. Give them a choice: they can either lose some of the fat, or get a whole lot stronger so they can carry the extra load. From a general health stand-point, it's better they lose the extra fat. They should still eat a balanced diet, but they are going to need to cut back on the quantities. As a coach, you can help them with this by telling them, "Eat what you like, but eat a little less of it." This approach will help the athlete feel less deprived and also allow for a slow healthy, weight loss. Stay away from radical diet plans, they end in failure 99% of the time. You can further aid the athlete by encouraging him to reduce his intake of fats such as red meat and butter and to cut down on junk food snacks.

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For the over-fat athlete who refuses to modify his eating habits, you can still help him attain his goals. By really concentrating on squats and deadlifts, this athlete can become strong enough to carry the extra load and still become an excellent athlete. If you, as his coach, still want him to get leaner, increase his running and agility drills so that he will burn up more calories.

The approach to nutrition I have given athletes and coaches is the most practical and easiest to stick with. Eating foods from the four major foods and in quantities appropriate to the individual's goals is easily understood and basically sound. You might add these rules to the diet plan. Cut down on processed foods and sugars. A thumbnail rule might be: "the less people handle a food item, the better it probably is." For example, fresh vegetables are better than canned and fresh roasted chicken is better than baloney.

Keeping a diet simple and basic also fits in with the "American way of eating." Mothers all over the country buy from the local supermarket a pretty good selection of food. Mom's usually shop very carefully, taking into consideration both quality and cost. It's not reasonable or practical for athletes to demand unusual or expensive items from specialty stores. Athletes simply have to do a better job of eating the good food which is put in front of them every day.

In my next article I will present the BFS plan for good nutrition. When an athlete believes a good diet is important and he knows basically how much and what to eat, he then needs an organized plan to help him stick to it. The unique Bigger Faster Stronger nutritional point system is both simple and effective.

This nutritional point system also gives the coach an easy-to-use tool to help monitor and encourage his athletes to "Eat to be Great."