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The Top 3 Nutrition Myths for Recreational Athletes

By Andrea Holwegner BSc, RD

While the **fitness** and **sports** industry offers creative and insightful tips on **training** and performance, I am constantly surprised by the lack of credible information promoted about **sports nutrition**, supplements, how to lose body fat, gain muscle mass and “get cut.”

I am fortunate to work with sports nutritionist [Carrie Mullin Innes](#), who helps to set the record straight. She has a master’s degree in science in nutrition and is one of the few **dietitians in Canada** that has completed the intensive **International Olympic Committee Diploma** in Sports Nutrition. Here are three of the most common myths we see in our practice about sports nutrition for **recreational athletes** and gym goers:



Myth No. 1: I need to eat more protein.

Fact: Focus on **carbs** and spread **protein** throughout the day.

There is a difference between having higher protein requirements and needing to eat more protein. Mullin Innes suggests that while athletes and those who train hard have **higher protein** needs than someone that is sedentary that doesn’t necessarily mean you need to eat more. Depending on the sport and training **athletes** need about 1.2 to 1.8 grams per kilogram of body weight versus 1 gram per kilogram of body weight for those that are inactive.

“The typical North American diet provides enough protein for the majority of the population” says Mullin Innes. “If you are **active** you are likely eating more food overall which provides you with more protein.” Also note that it is more relevant to look at spreading your protein intake throughout the day to maximize **muscle recovery** and maintenance. According to Mullin Innes most current research suggests 20 to 30 grams of protein is initially enough for adults after **exercise** and repeated small doses are best to be consumed at a time since your body can’t utilize much more than that at one time.

She also reminds athletes that enough **carbohydrates** should be the focus. “No matter what the sport, carbohydrates are the fuel for **workouts**. Each sport or style of training differs in the amount of carbohydrates that is needed depending on intensity and duration.

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Eating too much of any **nutrient** (carbs, protein or fat) can lead to unwanted **weight gain**. Restricting your carbohydrate intake is not necessary for **weight loss** and will be harmful for sports performance.

Myth No. 2: Water or coconut water is all your need.

Fact: You may need a traditional **sports drink**.

With so many beverage choices it may be confusing to sort out which is best. Mullin Innes suggests “while water is an appropriate fluid during most exercise lasting one hour or less, sports drinks provide **water, electrolytes** and energy for use during sports lasting longer than one hour when **muscle energy** stores start to drop.”

Runners, cyclists or those who are involved in weekend **sports tournaments** where several events will be played in one day are just a few of the groups that could benefit from **sports drinks**. Mullin Innes, an avid **marathon runner** herself, cautions that water alone may not fully **hydrate** you. She adds, “Sports drinks help to **retain more fluid** and **restores fluid** volume quicker.”

Coconut water might be a good choice for shorter workouts under one hour or to sip on as part of your **recovery meal** but Mullin Innes suggests, “coconut water lacks **sodium** and enough carbohydrates for **endurance sports** longer than one hour.”

Myth No. 3: Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.

Fact: The **recovery meal** after training is the most important.

You have likely heard that **breakfast** is the most important meal of the day, but I would argue for an active person it is instead the **recovery meal** after training.

While you may be tempted to skip eating all together after exercise if you are **trying to lose weight**, keep your recovery meal high. Mullin Innes suggests limiting high calorie, low nutrient dense foods and **watching portion sizes** at other times of the day. Also be mindful that just because you exercised doesn't mean you get a free pass to eat whatever you want.

No other meal provides as much significance on your energy for the next workout than the **recovery meal**. This is especially important if you do **split workouts** in the same day or have another intense **training session** scheduled within twenty-four hours.

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“After exercise, especially within the first two hours post training our muscle glycogen (carbohydrate) stores need to be refuelled in order to have energy for the next workout. After that, **muscle glycogen** can still be restored but will occur at a slower rate,” says Mullin Innes.

Timing is key and Mullin Innes suggests a snack within 30 minutes and a meal within the hour. While carbs should be the focus, the other key elements of a **healthy recovery meal** include protein and plenty of **antioxidant rich fruits and veggies**.

SIDEBAR:

5 Recovery Snack Ideas:

- Snack mix: Dried apricots/blueberries, nuts/seeds and dried cereal.
- Greek yogurt parfait with fruit and granola.
- Glass of milk/soy milk and fresh fruit.
- Unsweetened juice and homemade granola bar.
- Whole grain crackers with hummus and veggies.

5 Recovery Meal Ideas:

- Whole grain toast, eggs and fruit.
- Oatmeal with added nut butter, apples and raisins and tall glass of milk.
- Stir-fry with rice, chicken and veggies.
- Bran muffin and smoothie made with banana, berries and protein powder or powdered milk.
- Wrap with black beans, grated cheese, peppers, corn, salsa and avocado.

Andrea Holwegner, known as the Chocoholic Dietitian, is founder and president of Health Stand Nutrition Consulting Inc., a member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and a media expert for the Dietitians of Canada. For nutrition counselling information and to sign up for a free monthly newsletter loaded with nutrition tips, recipes and more visit www.healthstandnutrition.com. Twitter @chocoholicRD.

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