

Eat to Compete – Finding the Energy

Karen Armstrong RD

Everyone needs energy – to grow, to maintain and repair our bodies, to be healthy. If you're an athlete, you need energy to train and compete. Meeting your energy needs can help you get maximum benefit from your training and improve your performance.

Energy comes from food, in particular the carbohydrates in food. Your muscles can store a limited amount of carbohydrate, in the form of glycogen, to use for energy during exercise. This energy source is good for 90 minutes or less. Once the muscle glycogen is gone, you have to replace it by eating carbohydrate. If you don't, your muscles are running on empty and you'll have trouble getting through your training session or competition.

Carbohydrate is easy to find. It's in grain products, fruits, vegetables and milk. It's also in white and brown sugar, syrup, candy and pop. However, sugars, candy and pop don't give you vitamins, minerals and fibre, all of which are important for peak performance. Make whole grains, fruits, vegetables and milk your preferred carbohydrates and use the other foods as treats.

Pasta please

Pasta is often a staple in active households. It's a great source of carbohydrate, easy and quick to prepare, really versatile and comes in some pretty funky shapes. But maybe it's time to expand your pasta horizons. The variety of pastas, and noodles, is greater than ever before. Most stores now carry whole grain and multigrain pasta. These higher fibre pastas are a great way to add a bit more fibre to a meal without anyone noticing.

For even more fibre and additional protein, look for dry pastas made from spelt or kamut. Spelt and kamut are ancient grains that are making a comeback in breads, cereals and pastas. You'll find these pastas, along with spelt and kamut flour, in specialty shops and bulk food stores. Cook them like any other pasta – perfect in baked casseroles or topped with your favourite sauce.

Or consider rice noodles, brown rice pasta or fresh buckwheat noodles (soba) – more interesting choices to satisfy your taste buds and help replenish your glycogen stores. Although most often used in Asian dishes, these noodles and pastas are tasty topped with pesto or a traditional tomato sauce.

So think outside the box of mac and cheese, and add a little variety to your pasta choices.

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Manitoba Chicken Producers represents 143 farm families raising chickens that are free-run, grain-fed and free of added hormones. For more information on buying locally grown chicken, visit the Buying Guide at www.chicken.mb.ca