

Meal Frequency & Planning

In any performance nutrition program, whether it's fat-loss, wanting to increase lean muscle or develop better nutritional habits, the most important element is meal frequency and planning.

Every athlete, regardless of the sport, should eat a minimum of 5-7 times per day (planning), every 3-4 hours (frequency). By planning and eating frequently, you will:

- Experience a 10-20% increase in metabolic rate (ability to burn calories at rest)
- Maintain blood sugar levels and insulin levels
- Maintain energy levels throughout the day
- Avoid hunger-pains, which lead to over-eating
- Provide small “packets” of nutrients throughout the day
- Maximizes digestion and absorption of nutrients
- Prevents fat storage from excess calories and
- Creates an anabolic bodily environment to build lean muscle tissue

Smaller more frequent meals provide more nutrients to the body more often and enhance the body's ability to absorb, digest and utilize these nutrients. This enhanced and frequent delivery of nutrients will result in greater recovery and tissue repair between workouts and competition while decreasing the likelihood of fat storage. However, limit yourself to eating the traditional 3 square meals a day and it's impossible to get the nutrients you need to be your best.

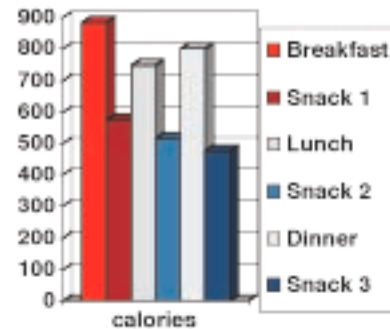


Don't believe me? Lets try an approach of comparisons. Look at the athlete's body as an empty glass of water with a 20-ounce (oz) capacity. Now, associate water as food. What do you think would happen if the athlete tried to put 25+ ounces of water (food) in a 20-oz glass (body)? It would over-flow, right! Well, think of the water over-flow as nutrient loss and fat storage in the body. When you consume too many calories in one setting, the body is unable to utilize all the nutrients causing the excess to be passed through the body or dumped into fat storage.

By eating small frequent meals throughout the entire day at a frequency of every 3-4 hours, you are constantly refueling your body, never over filling, but rather peaking energy stores for proper energy metabolism, sustained performance while facilitating muscle protein synthesis (muscle growth) and recovery.

When you limit yourself to just 3-meals per day, your body is forced to go long periods without food. This causes the body to go into what is known as “starvation mode”. Starvation mode results when there aren’t enough calories to support daily activities. Such carelessness causes the body to be thrown into a “catabolic state” (eating itself) in which the body is forced to sacrifice lean muscle tissue for energy in an effort to support energy metabolism.

Example 4000 Calorie/Day Meal Schedule



The loss of lean muscle tissue will result in:

- Increase in fat mass
- Reduced speed, strength & power
- Lowering of the body’s basal metabolic rate (ability to burn calories at rest)
- Diminish performance capability and
- Lead to over-training and possible injury

If you get anything from reading this article, get this: **When you strength train, condition or practice you are actually getting WEAKER, NOT STRONGER!** The reason is because when you train you are depleting energy systems and breaking down muscle tissue through repetitive muscle contraction (i.e., running, jumping, sprinting). If this weren’t true, then at the end of a training session you would be able to restart and perform at the same volume and intensity as previous with little or no change in performance.

Not until after you train and you begin refueling the body with the proper nutrients that optimal performance and recovery can be facilitated through the body. This is referred to as “training adaptation,” which allows for the greatest degree of speed, strength and power development, resulting in a greater training effect and enhanced performance. If the athlete fails to do so, the lack of nutrients, compounded with day-to-day training, will prevent the body from recovering fully thus, leading to over-training and potential injury.