

Getting More Results From Exercise Starts With Nutrition

Whether the goal is more energy, better sleep, improved performance, increased strength, muscle gain, fat loss, or simply feeling better, many people find progress feels slower than expected. It is common to assume the answer is to workout harder or **do more**. **Often, the missing piece is nutrition**. Even healthy foods can fall short if the body is not getting what it needs to perform, recover, and adapt.

If you've been putting in effort but not seeing the progress you expected, one of these common habits may be holding you back.

1. Not eating enough protein

Protein helps repair muscle, supports recovery, and helps keep you full between meals. If you are exercising regularly but not getting enough protein, it can be harder to build strength, recover well, or improve body composition.

General goals:

- Women: **25 to 35 grams per meal**
- Men: **30 to 45 grams per meal**
- Teens: **20 to 35 grams per meal** depending on age, size, and activity

Simple ways to increase protein:

- Add eggs or Greek yogurt at breakfast
- Include chicken, fish, tofu, or beans at meals
- Use protein-rich snacks like cottage cheese or edamame

2. Under-fueling carbs for activity

Carbohydrates are a useful fuel source for exercise. Eating them around workouts can help support performance, recovery, and energy levels. If overall fuel intake is too low for your

activity level, workouts can feel harder than they should, and energy may drop later in the day.

Carbs before exercise help **provide energy**. Carbs after exercise help refill muscle glycogen stores and support **muscle recovery and growth**.

Quick and easy carb choices include:

- Fruit
- Overnight oats
- Potatoes or sweet potatoes
- Yogurt with fruit
- Cooked rice cups or microwave rice
- Whole grain toast or English muffin



3. Overdoing healthy snacks and liquid calories

Trail mix, smoothies, juices, coffee drinks, and energy bites can be healthy, and those calories add up quickly. It's easy to accidentally eat more than you realize through snacks and drinks.

For example, a popular Starbucks Venti White Chocolate Mocha with whipped cream can have as many calories as a **full meal**.

Helpful tips:

Build most meals around **whole foods first**, then use snacks intentionally when truly hungry or when needed around exercise.

Try tracking your food for just **1 to 2 days**. Many people are surprised how quickly calories from drinks, snacks, sauces, and small bites add up.

4. Poor hydration or misusing electrolytes

Hydration is the **foundation** of how your body functions. Even mild dehydration can affect energy, focus, mood, digestion, workout performance, and recovery. It can be easy to forget to drink enough water or drink too many electrolyte drinks because they're tasty.



Some electrolyte packets can be very high in sodium. For example, one LMNT packet contains **1,000 mg sodium**, which can be **excessive** for sedentary days.

Electrolytes can be helpful during long workouts, heavy sweating, hot weather, sauna use, or illness with fluid loss.

General daily guidelines:

- Aim for **half your body weight** in ounces of water daily
- Pale yellow urine usually means well hydrated
- Many active people benefit from one balanced electrolyte serving daily with roughly **300 to 600 mg sodium, 150 to 300 mg potassium, and 50 to 100 mg magnesium**
- Increase fluids and electrolytes with sweat, heat, workouts, or sauna
- If you have blood pressure, kidney, or sodium concerns, **ask your healthcare provider**

5. Inconsistent meal timing

Consistent meals help **maintain energy, support recovery**, and make it easier to choose **balanced meals** instead of grabbing whatever is available when hunger gets too high. Skipping meals, waiting too long to eat, or eating most calories late at night can leave you under-fueled during the day.

Tips for eating consistently:

- Keep quick meals on hand for busy days
- Pack snacks or lunch the night before
- Use simple staples like yogurt, eggs, rotisserie chicken, fruit, oats, or wraps
- Keep emergency snacks on hand

- Use a few repeatable meal options on busy weeks

6. Not eating enough overall

Sometimes people are so focused on eating “clean” that they unintentionally eat too little. Too little fuel can increase fatigue, cravings, low mood, and slower recovery. Your body needs enough energy to **support movement, healing, and daily life.**

Helpful tip:

Use a calorie calculator to estimate your needs based on age, size, goals, and activity. Then track your intake for a few days to see where you realistically fall. I like:

www.freedieting.com/calorie-calculator

You **do not need to obsess**, but it helps to have general targets for protein, fat, carbohydrates, and total calories.



7. Poor recovery and sleep

Recovery is where **progress** happens. Results do not only come from workouts. Without enough sleep or recovery time, energy, hormones, appetite, and motivation can all suffer.

Recovery tips:

- Go to bed and wake up around the same time most days
- Include at least **one rest day** per week
- Try stretching or walking on recovery days
- Use stress tools like deep breathing, sunlight, journaling, or evening screen limits
- Sleep goals: men **7 to 9 hours**, women **8 to 10 hours**, teens **8 to 10 hours** nightly

8. Weekend habits undoing weekday progress

A consistent weekday routine can be offset by two days of overeating, heavy drinking, poor sleep, or little movement. This does not mean perfection is needed, but patterns matter.

Try to keep some rhythm on weekends:

- Stay active
- Keep regular meals
- Hydrate
- Enjoy treats mindfully
- Get enough sleep



Takeaways for the month

If workouts are not paying off, the answer may not be doing more exercise. Often it is doing the basics better.

Focus on these habits first:

- Eat enough protein
- Fuel activity with quality carbs
- Stay hydrated
- Recover well
- Be consistent most of the time

Small nutrition habits done regularly often outperform extreme plans done briefly.

Coaching Support

If you need help optimizing your nutrition for exercise, improving recovery, or you are not seeing the progress you hoped for, meeting with a nutritionist can help. A personalized plan can make it easier to fuel properly, stay consistent, and reach your goals.

To schedule a session, contact Stephanie Happe at stephanie.happe@baysport.com

Sources

American College of Sports Medicine. Nutrition and athletic performance: acsm.org

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Protein and exercise recovery: eatright.org

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hsph.harvard.edu