McCaskill Family Services
Your Road To Success

Plymouth Location
409 Plymouth Rd., Ste 250
Plymouth, MI 48170
Phone: (734) 416-9098
Fax: (734) 416-0158

Brighton Location
2040 Grand River Anx., Ste. 300
Brighton, MI 48114
Phone: (810) 224-1676
Fax: (734) 416-0158

office@mccaskillfamilyservices.com ● wwww.mccaskillfamilyservices.com

Fueling for Activity: 10 Tips to Make Sure You're Eating Enough

Written by: Daylan Wentland, MS, RD



Exercise is well known for its health benefits. But did you know exercise is not as healthful for us if we aren't eating enough? Read on to learn more about ways to ensure you aren't underfueling for the activity you are doing.

1. **It is common to under fuel for exercise unintentionally**

   Energy needs for those who move frequently are higher than for someone who doesn't. In a culture that values thinness and often encourages under-eating, the amount of food that may be necessary for an athlete to eat can feel like a lot. Undernourishment can impact not only performance, but also physical and mental health. Some signs that you might need to eat more can include: decreased strength, power, speed, or performance; fatigue or feeling sluggish; difficulty concentrating; muscle cramping; increased injury or injuries that don't heal quickly; increased recovery time; feeling hungry all the time or having no appetite at all; irregular or missing periods; difficulty sleeping; and an over reliance on caffeine.

2. **Carbohydrates are the primary source of energy for the body, including exercise, and should be eaten with every meal and snack**

   Protein is often the most commonly discussed nutrient in regards to exercise. However, when we move, our muscles require glucose, a form of sugar, to use as its preferred fuel. Glucose primarily comes from the carbohydrates we eat as a part of our diets. High carbohydrate foods include: grain products like pasta, bread, and rice; starchy vegetables like sweet corn and potatoes; beans and legumes such as chickpeas or lentils; fruit and fruit juice; and sugar sweetened foods and beverages like chocolate milk, gatorade, breakfast cereal, or cookies.

3. **Both simple and complex carbohydrates are important forms of energy to include every day**

   Simple carbohydrates are those made up of smaller sugar molecules that our body digests quickly such as fruit, sports gels, and white bread. These carbs are important when we need energy quickly. Complex carbohydrates are made up of longer chains of sugar molecules called starches and often also contain fiber. Oatmeal, whole wheat bread, and beans are examples of complex carbs. The glucose present in these carbs digest more slowly, provide ongoing energy, and keep you full for longer.

4. **Protein is still important**

   While protein is the macronutrient the body uses least often for overall energy, it is necessary for the growth and repair of all tissues in the body- including muscles. Protein is also important for hormonal balance and keeping you full after meals and snacks. Therefore, it is still recommended to include a source of protein with all meals and most snacks throughout the day. Protein is most important after a workout to support muscle recovery. Sources of protein include: nuts and seeds, beans and legumes, eggs, dairy, meat, fish, soy products like tofu, and protein powders.

5. **For active individuals, a general structure or framework for eating is often helpful**

   Find a schedule and structure that works best for you. While every body is different, a common place to start would be eating at least 3 meals and 2 snacks/day, aiming to eat something at least every 3-4 hours. This structure helps to maintain a stable blood sugar and mood throughout the day and provides many opportunities to get enough energy in. When your day is busy, planning meals ahead of time can be helpful for ensuring food doesn't get forgotten.

6. **You can, and should, still eat adequately on rest days**

   We often feel the need to "earn" our food or may feel we shouldn't eat as much if we aren't going to workout. However, your body needs fuel to function every day- no matter how active you are. Rest days or days where you may move less than others are a great way to provide reprieve to your body, allow for muscle recovery and repair, and replenish energy stores.

7. **Don't forget about fluids**

   Hydration throughout the day is important to replenish fluids lost to sweat, assist with the movement of nutrients through the body and waste out of the body, aids digestion, and helps maintain your body's temperature. Drinking at least 60-80 fl oz of water is recommended, but you may need more if you exercise intensely, sweat a lot, or the weather is warmer. During periods of more intensive sweating or when exercising for more than 2 hours, including electrolyte packets or drinks is helpful. A good sign of adequate hydration is looking at the color of your urine when you go to the bathroom- a lemonade like color or a bit lighter signals adequate hydration; darker yellow and verging on orange is often a sign of dehydration.

8. **Nutrient needs differ before, during, and after exercise**

   Before exercise, focus on hydration and carbohydrates to ensure your muscles have adequate glucose available and to decrease dehydration while you sweat. If you are within an hour of when you'll be active, simple carbohydrates are best to get energy to your bloodstream quickly and prevent GI upset. If you exercise for 2 or more hours straight or exercise very intensely, you may need to eat something while you are still exercising. Simple carbohydrates are often best for this as well. After a workout, protein should be paired with carbohydrates to allow for muscle recovery and the replenishing of your energy stores. Either eat a protein and carbohydrate rich snack followed by a meal later or a full meal with a variety of food groups within an hour of completing your workout.

9. **Hunger and fullness cues can be impacted by intense exercise and may not always tell you if you've had enough**

   Relying solely on hunger and fullness cues as an athlete can be difficult. Exercising early in the morning, very intensely, or multiple times throughout the day can all impact our body's cues. While eating when you are hungry and stopping when you are full is important, if you don't receive these cues often enough or notice your appetite is lower after a workout, you may need to eat before and after a workout, even if you don't feel ready to. There are also times when our schedule may dictate when we can and can't eat, so eating when you have the opportunity may not always correlate to when you are your most hungry.

10. **No one is perfect! Try to do your best, consistently, most of the time**

    Judgment isn't the best motivation. Compassion for yourself and respect towards your body can go much farther towards helping you feel good about movement and about yourself. Taking the stress off of health behaviors helps them to be even healthier for us. Furthermore, for the most health benefits, behaviors need to be maintained over time. It is much easier to do this when we are enjoying ourselves than when we are rigid and stressed about our routines.

You always have permission to eat enough and eat foods you enjoy. To improve your performance and help you feel your strongest, adequate fuel and hydration is necessary for athletes. If these concepts were interesting to you, but you'd like additional assistance with applying them to yourself or would simply like to learn more, consider making a nutrition appointment. Contact our office today to collaborate on the next steps toward improving you or your loved one's relationship with food and their body.