

## Ten Energy Foods for Fitness and Fun



Are you feeling a bit down with the long winter blues? Now is the time to start gearing up for warmer weather and outdoor activities. Maybe the Olympics have inspired you get in shape! Whatever the reason your body will need energy to fuel your fitness campaign.

For over all health a balanced diet is the cornerstone, especially a diet that includes plenty of fruits and vegetables. Really active sports fanatics will also need lots of complex carbohydrates. After working out you need to replace stores of muscle glycogen (storage carbohydrates in your muscle). It has been reported that Michael Phelps requires about 12,000 calories per day to maintain his energy for training. You will probably need significantly fewer calories but the benefit of a fit body is that you can eat more. Not more junk! Vitamins and minerals from fruits and vegetables are very important to the refueling process and to ensure that you can burn stored energy rather than breakdown body protein.

Here are ten great foods for great balance and energy:

**Bananas:** Besides being a good source of complex carbs bananas are high in Vit. C and B6. A plain banana makes a great work out snack and provides its own packaging!

**Milk or Yogurt:** Milk products provide the minerals calcium, phosphorus, and potassium; Vit.s A, D and riboflavin, plus protein and carbohydrates. If you are working extra hard you can afford the sugar calories in low fat chocolate milk or flavored yogurts.

**Nuts:** Nuts and nut butters are easy to prepare and carry. They pack a big energy punch and are also high in protein. They are higher in fats but those fats are heart healthy in small amounts. A fourth of a cup of dry roasted nuts or two tablespoons of peanut butter are just right.

**Oats:** Oat cereal or oatmeal is a great way to start your day. Add milk or yogurt and some banana slices or berries and you are well on your way to a productive day. Oats have heart healthy fiber that can help you feel filled without feeling weighed down. Be somewhat careful about oat sports or snack bars and granolas. Some of these are also packed with sugar and should be used when your workout for the day exceeds two hours.

**Lean Meat in Moderation:** In spite of sports lore you don't need a large amount of protein when in training. Two to three ounces of meat per meal is plenty for most athletes. Think of the size of a deck of cards when choosing meat portions. Do not use restaurant portions as a guide! Lean meats provide protein for

replacing normal turnover of body tissues and repair of any damaged body cells. Your body can make some protein from other foods, which is why the amount of protein you must eat is not high. Physical exertion (stress) on your muscles will trigger your body to make muscle tissue. Simply eating more protein will not make more muscle without physical activity. Muscle development is also regulated by your genetic make up, age and gender. Men have more muscle than women. People in their early twenties and through their forties have more muscle than people at other ages. People over forty must perform some sort of regular weight bearing exercise to prevent muscle loss as muscle strength and mass will decrease as we age unless we stay fit.

**Salads:** Assorted Green vegetables with bits of lean meat make wonderful light meals. You can create salads from an unlimited assortment of low calorie vegetables and fruits and add meat, hard cooked eggs or cheese to fill up the stomach with out adding so many calories that you need to worry about weight gain. The biggest concern with salads is the dressing. Most commercial dressings have lots of fat and are very high in calories. Try low fat dressings, or just use salsa as a dressing. It is very easy to make your own dressings with vinegar and oil. Many commercial dressings have twice as much oil as vinegar. In making your own dressing, try using half oil and half vinegar. Try different vinegars and different oils to see what flavor variations you like best. Limit the amount of salad dressing to 1 tablespoon per cup of salad mix.

**Beans:** If beans don't 'gas propel' you they are an excellent source of fiber, carbohydrate, vitamins and minerals. Beans are a great addition to salads or rice for a high protein but meatless meal. Hummus and pita bread is great for a quick breakfast.

**Dried Fruit:** Dried apricots, raisins, cranberries and others are very portable and provide many of the same health benefits as fresh fruits. They can be mixed with nuts for variety. These items are perfect for long hikes, biking or canoeing.

**Good Fats:** These are protective of your heart and don't elevate cholesterol levels in small amounts. Think of vegetable based oils, olive oil, avocados, fish, nuts and seeds.

