Eating for Recreational Athletes
Intended for those exercising or engaging in physical activity 30 – 60 minutes most days

Calories and Carbohydrates – you don’t need to add many. Running 30 minutes burns about as many calories as are in a cup and a half of rice. Walking 30 minutes burns about as many calories as are in an average sized banana. Simply add a small snack and/or slightly increase the portion size of one of your meals to help compensate for the calories burned during physical activity.

Protein – you’re probably getting enough. A good goal for recreational athletes is to eat ⅓ - ½ g protein per pound of body weight daily. The average adult in the US consumes about ½ g protein per pound of body weight. If you are restricting calories, such as a weight loss diet, or protein sources, such as a vegetarian or vegan diet, you may need to monitor your protein intake.

Vitamins and Minerals – most vitamin and mineral needs for recreational athletes can generally be satisfied by meeting the RDAs established by the USDA. However, athletes, along with most Americans, don’t consume enough of some vitamins and minerals. Consume a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, and whole grains and take supplements if needed to help meet recommended intakes of vitamins and minerals to support overall health and physical activity. If significant sweating occurs during physical activity, sodium (salt) needs may be higher than for sedentary individuals.

Fluid – sweating significantly increases fluid losses. Heavy breathing associated with physical activity can also increase fluid losses especially in dry or cold conditions. Most recreationally active individuals and athletes can stay sufficiently hydrated by drinking whenever they are thirsty before, during, and after physical activity. Older persons, those exercising in the cold, or other individuals with impaired thirst may need to adopt a hydration strategy designed to reduce fluid losses to no more than 2% body weight during physical activity.

Sports Beverages – athletes do not need to drink sports beverages when exercising 60 minutes or less. Athletes may still choose to use a sport beverage if they prefer the taste or to replace sodium lost through sweat if they exercise in the heat. A carbohydrate-rich beverage may also slightly improve performance of high-intensity endurance activities lasting 30-60 minutes when used as a mouth rinse and then either consumed or spit out.

Timing of Meals and Supplements – eat at least three balanced meals daily. Avoid large meals within 3-4 hours of strenuous exercise to prevent stomach upset and digestive problems during exercise. Consuming protein and carbohydrate immediately after strenuous exercise may promote faster recovery, improved strength, and better body composition. Adding creatine to the protein and carbohydrate supplement may provide even greater adaptations to resistance training as well as increased muscle size.