How can young athletes increase or improve their performance?

By Sandy Giacobbe, D.C.

The Body needs nutrients to perform and operate efficiently. The greater the demand on the body, the more good nutrients are needed to help sustain it. This is especially important for young athletes because of their active lifestyle, rigorous training schedules and because they are growing (building bones and muscle), etc.

It is also important to note that any individual who exercises regularly needs to supplement their diet with high quality nutrition because of the greater demands being placed on their bodies.

Young athletes also require nutrients that are easily absorbed; nutrients that are balanced and in the proper ratio and nutrients that come from high quality whole food sources. These high quality supplements have been known to help athletes achieve peak performance, sustain more energy and recover more quickly from injuries, sprains and bruises. That is why professional athletes use high quality nutritional supplements as part of their regiment and lifestyle.

The requirements to achieve a nutritionally balanced diet consists of approximately 40% protein, 30% healthy fats and 30% complex carbohydrates. However, athletes require even more protein to rebuild their muscles. The number one source for these types of properly balanced foods are found in nature. Nature provides us with whole foods: green vegetables, fresh fruits, whole grains, nuts and seeds; protein from fresh poultry, eggs, fish and lean meats, and healthy fats like olive oil and oils rich in omegas (essential fats). These foods provide the nutrients which are carried throughout the body to “feed” the cells and give us the energy to function, repair and heal. However, sometimes it is challenging due to our busy lives to prepare nutritionally balanced meals and even when we do, today’s modern diet is lacking in some basic nutrients. This is why I recommend high quality protein drinks and whole food supplements for my young patients and for my own children who are young, growing and athletic. High quality supplements are a great way to easily get what may be missing. Taking them becomes an insurance policy for the body and creates a reserve system for more energy, more efficient immune function and quicker recovery time from injuries.

Processed and refined foods such as white bread and sugary sweets are “junk” foods that can wreak havoc on an athletes performance because they easily convert to sugar and cause blood sugar spikes which ultimately sabotage an athletes ability to sustain performance. Even food that is labeled “enriched” and fortified with added nutrients is never as healthy as that which is found in nature. This also applies to nutritional supplements. Many people are not aware that most supplements are synthetic - man made.

A whole food nutritional supplement is different in that it comes from whole foods (found in nature) in either a bio-available or liquid form which will be more readily absorbed by the body, whereas synthetic supplements are not easily absorbed and are utilized differently because the body does not recognize these as a food source. In some cases the body will only utilize as little as 10-30% of a synthetic supplement. The rest is eliminated by the body which means you are spending more and getting less. So, read your labels and get your athlete on a healthy food plan and a good whole food supplement, and along with plenty of sleep, fresh water and some recreational fun you can watch them increase or improve their performance.

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