

## Nutrition & Hockey Players

### Proper Nutrition Is More Important Than Ever

Within the past year, I've focused my attention on researching various ways to help my clients obtain their maximum potential in their off-season training, as well as to help them perform at the top of their game in-season. As we've known for many years now, *nutrition* plays a vital role in the body's performance both on and off the ice. Substantial amounts of information are presented to us on the importance of eating protein and carbohydrates (in the form of pasta and bread) but I don't believe there's enough attention given to the importance of raw fruits and vegetables in our diet.

You see, the cells in your body, especially muscle cells which athletes are most concerned with will not perform up to their maximum capacity unless:

1. a maximum amount of oxygen can be delivered to the cell through the circulatory blood system
2. the cell itself must be healthy enough to absorb enough oxygen

If the muscle cells are in a weakened condition and they don't get enough required nutrients, they cannot develop to their full capacity. It is also impossible for the cells to perform at their full potential due to the fact that they cannot get enough oxygen, therefore, limiting the player's performance.

Medical research has found that the key ingredients for cellular growth and performance come from a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts and seeds. The Canada Food Guide recommends 5-9 servings of fresh, raw fruits and vegetables per day but did you know that athletes require an even greater number of servings. Nutritionists and fitness experts I've consulted with recommend that an athlete eat 10-13 servings per day.

Throughout my past 20 years as a player, coach and trainer of hockey players, I've realized that it is nearly impossible for these athletes (especially teenagers) to eat this many servings a day. Fortunately, there are some credible whole food nutritionally based products, which can help fill in the gaps and assist the athlete in getting the required amount of fruit and vegetables per day.

A diet rich in fresh, raw fruits and vegetables ensures that the athlete gets the vitamins and minerals that his/her body needs without having to take a vitamin/mineral supplement (which many studies now indicate do not work because they are in isolated forms). Not only does a diet rich in fruits and vegetables ensure that athlete's muscles will work in peak performance but there are many other benefits as well. *For example, the antioxidants, which come from raw fruits and vegetables, help repair DNA damage, strengthens the immune system, reduces oxidative stress, and lowers the risk factors associated with heart disease, stroke and cancers.*

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Today, research studies indicate that a person who gets the required amount of fruits and vegetables reduces their risk of developing cancer by 75%.

The way I see it, if you're a coach or a serious athlete and you're interested in peak performance, you must realize that it must begin at the cellular level through good nutrition. Training can only be successful if the cells in the body are strong enough to withstand the stress being placed on them; especially the (physical) stress a hockey player endures throughout his / her career.

"What we eat makes the body and is probably the most important factor affecting our health, energy level, longevity and quality of life."

Mike Thompson

Tommyfit Hockey-Specific Strength Training & Conditioning

*For more information on how proper nutrition affects an athlete's body, go to [www.tommyfit.ca](http://www.tommyfit.ca) or phone 604.607.1231.*

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