

# How to be a High Performance Machine

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Most of us recognize the importance of nutrition for the sport of gymnastics. We know that what an athlete eats can directly effect motivation and concentration levels, flexibility and strength. By improving the overall adequacy of dietary intake, hydration levels and eating schedule, an athlete will realize many benefits. Improved productivity during the last hours of training, more successful skill completion, a more positive training attitude, and a decrease in his or her risk of injury are several key outcomes. What a wonderful way to foster healthy and happy athletes.

What about the health and happiness of our staff, those that mold and develop our gymnasts? Can their productivity in the gym also be improved? Energy levels maintained longer? Mood and attitude kept at an optimum? ABSOLUTELY!!! After all, gymnastics coaches and staff are high performance machines as well. You are responsible for motivating, organizing, scheduling, spotting, instructing, encouraging, and empowering our athletes. You have relationships to build with parents and surrounding peers. You set high expectations of yourself, not only at the gym, but at home as well. So why not maximize your potential for performance by optimizing your nutrition intake?

**Here are a few easy to follow guidelines and realistic tips to optimize your overall nutrition:**

## **1. Planning and preparation are the keys to nutrition success.**

Initially eating healthy will take longer and may seem like a chore. However, it soon will become second nature and you'll enjoy the benefits so much you'll have it no other way. The time to think about what you are going to eat each day is the night before. Review your commitments and time schedule for the next day. Take 10 minutes to cut, spread, mix, wrap and/or pack your food. This is a time-saver for the next morning and allows you to eat more healthy that day. The pay off is great! Stock up on ziplock snack and sandwich bags, as well as freezer bags. Wash and cut your vegetables when you get home from shopping and store them in the ziplock bags. Place a paper towel in the bag to absorb the moisture. If you have purchased more vegetables than you will use in a couple of days, then put the ready to go bags in the freezer. Also, if you make pasta or a stew on Sunday, you can freeze individual portions, dated & identified for quick and easy access after practice during the week. This holds true for any leftovers.

## **2. Make grocery shopping a weekly priority.**

Start with a grocery shopping list that you keep with you and one on the refrigerator. This will improve actual time spent in the grocery store and what you bring home. Spend the majority of your time shopping the perimeter of the store where the fresh produce, meats, dairy and whole foods are, versus packaged, prepared and canned foods. Remember, to be successful, planning and preparation is the key! It will take more time in the beginning, but each time you will become more efficient. You may even start to enjoy grocery shopping. If you cannot get to the store, consider giving your list to a parent at the gym, staff member, or other family member and pay them to go shopping for you. I'd go for \$10! It's a small price to pay when you think about the trade off.

### **3. Start choosing your meals by color.**

Your goal is to have 5-9 servings of fruits and vegetables every day. A serving is considered 1 piece of fruit, 4 oz fruit juice, 1 cup raw vegetables, 1/2 cup cooked vegetables or 6 oz vegetable juice. By increasing the amount of green, red, orange, and yellow foods to your diet you are adding valuable phytochemicals that are important in helping protect against certain types of cancer and other diseases. Start the day by adding berries to your oatmeal or cereal with a glass of orange juice. This adds orange and red to your initially bland colored breakfast. By doing so you are also adding low calorie, high nutrient dense foods to your diet improving the overall vitamin and mineral intake. This may allow for better utilization, metabolism, and absorption of the macronutrients (carbohydrate, fat & protein) you are eating. Sneak baby spinach leaves, cut zucchini or red peppers on to your sandwich. If you can't stand the taste of vegetables buy pureed spinach, sweet potatoes or squash in the baby food section of the grocery store and mix a jar into your spaghetti sauce while heating it up. You will not see the vegetable or taste it, but reap the benefits all of the nutrients. Graduate up the lettuce ladder. Pass on Iceberg and give Romaine and some of the darker leaf lettuces a try. Nutritionally you'll be doing yourself a big favor. Try buying salads in a bag. They are ready to go and well worth the price because now you're more likely to eat a salad since preparation time is decreased dramatically.

### **4. Establish meal scheduling as a priority in your day.**

#### **a) NEVER skip breakfast**

It truly is the most important meal of the day. It springboards you into the day and sets the tone for the rest of your choices. Breakfast is a perfect time to start getting your 5-9 fruits and vegetables for the day. It also jump-starts your metabolism into working. For those of us that skip breakfast, our bodies go into a starvation or survival mode. We conserve our energy as if we were not going to be fed again. Therefore, our metabolic rate or our caloric need will actually decrease. What happens after that is we need to eat fewer calories in a 24 hour period than we did before to maintain our weight. Typically this is one of the reasons why the scale keeps climbing. Breakfast also gives you the needed available energy to perform at your best until lunch. If we skip breakfast, we become fatigued late in the morning and are unable to concentrate very well. Many people suffer from headaches that start around 10:30 -11:00 a.m. and can't get rid of them even after they eat lunch. Next time, skip the aspirin instead of breakfast.

#### **b) Go no longer than 4 hours without eating and incorporate snacks to get you to the next meal.**

This will help you make better choices at the next meal and help maintain your energy and attitude. For example, if you eat breakfast at 7:00 a.m. then at 11:00 it is time to eat again. Have a snack to hold you over to lunch. If you have lunch at 1:00 p.m. then at 5:00 p.m. it is time to eat again. But you will be at the gym and do not have time to eat between classes. You will not be home until 9:00 p.m. What should you do? At 5:00 p.m., take time to eat a more substantial snack like a sandwich and a beverage. Typically, 100 calories per hour is a quick and dirty way to determine the quantity of the snack to have to hold you over until the next meal. Also, a midmorning or afternoon snack is the perfect time to squeeze in another fruit and/or vegetable serving. Try some cut carrots & jicama, celery sticks with peanut butter, frozen grapes or some dried cranberries and pretzels. Other ideas include nonfat

yogurt or string cheese and a couple lowfat crackers. It is important to plan ahead for the time spent at the gym. Most coaches and staff are working through meal and snack times. Bring convenient/healthy foods with you and make it a priority to eat them. Rotate with another staff member in leading warm-ups to allow both of you the opportunity to eat your food. Also, this is a perfect time to set an example about the importance of eating. It is no time to show up with a soft drink, fast-food burger and large fries. Show your athletes that there are healthy choices at fast food restaurants and that you eat them. Plus you will now have energy be a better coach during their practice. If the practice lasts longer than 2.5 - 3 hours and the girls are taking a quick snack break, use that time to have your snack as well.

**c) It is OK to eat when you get home from the gym even if it's late and you're going to bed soon.**

After a long day at the gym, it is important to listen to your body and eat if you are hungry even if it's late at night. This is the time however to make sure your choices are healthy and your portions are reasonable. If you are hungry, most likely your body needs calories and the nutrients from the food. It is important to not over eat because we may store those calories as fat and this is one thing we are all trying to avoid. Calorie control takes place over a 24 hour period. Look at the entire day and make a smart choice late at night. A frozen dinner and a glass of nonfat milk is a nutritious, quick and easy, reasonable portion size meal. Add a salad with lowfat/nonfat dressing to that and your increasing its nutrient value tremendously by adding color to your meal without greatly increasing the caloric content.

## **5. Listen to your body. Eat when hungry and stop when full.**

By incorporating this recommendation along with your eating schedule, you'll start eating more often during the day, but in smaller amounts. This will help you utilize the food you are eating instead of storing it as fat. It also allows you to more easily incorporate your fruit and vegetable servings for the day. If you are out to eat, do not hesitate to wrap half of your meal up and save it for tomorrow's lunch. The best part is that it's all ready to go.

The best way to get started is to try one or two of the above recommendations a week. Cut out the summary below and keep it in your day planner for a quick reminder. Take the time to realize the benefits of eating a healthier more nutritious diet. Initially, you should notice an improvement in your energy level and mood. This will serve as reinforcement to continue your efforts. Soon you will see an improvement in your effectiveness while coaching and working at the gym. What a wonderful way to foster happy and healthy coaches and staff!

## **Be A High Performance Machine By Improving Your Nutrition**

1. Planning & Preparation
2. Grocery shopping weekly
3. Choose your meals by color
4. Meal Scheduling

- a) Never skip breakfast
- b) Go no longer than 4 hours without eating
- c) Make healthy choices when eating late at night

5. Eat when hungry, stop when full

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