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Vegetarian Versus Omnivore Diets in Athletes

A long-standing debate in sports nutrition centers on vegetarian versus omnivore (vegetable and animal-based) diets. While proponents of both have long made claims about the benefits and drawbacks of their respective diets, scientific studies have not realized an obvious benefit or detriment of either diet in exercising people in relation to their physical performance.

The vegetarian diet may leave the possibility of a few key nutrient deficiencies if little variety is supplied in food choices. Nutrients that are most commonly found to be deficient in vegetarian diets include protein, iron, folate and vitamin B-12. These may become apparent if dietary choices are not well planned. One reason for this is that protein, iron and B-12 are found in abundance in animal-based foods. However, all of these nutrients can be found in a solely vegetarian diet that contains a wide variety of foods, especially seeds and nuts, which contain higher amounts of those nutrients.

Regardless of diet type, as long as one is consuming enough in the way of calories and essential nutrients, eating one way or the other won't drastically change performance. The key with any diet is a wide variety of food choices (many people eat the same 10 food ingredients every week!) and really observing how the body reacts to certain foods.

There are certain instances when a particular food or food group in excess or lack may affect the way one feels physically. In these cases, it is advisable for that person to be tested for food sensitivities, and then add or remove foods based on the results. Examples of common food sensitivities are dairy products that cause wheezing, heavy-protein foods that leave one feeling bloated, and grains that cause digestive problems.

Taking a good look at the diet with a nutritional evaluation is a good way to uncover some hidden limitations to performance and general well being. Additionally, I often perform a blood test for food sensitivities that can have diverse negative effects on health.

Common Painkillers Raise the Risk of Heart Disease

Adding to the already long list of side effects from taking pain medications (ibuprofen, acetaminophen, and aspirin) researchers have found that these drugs will also raise blood pressure. Published in the Archives of Internal Medicine, the research shows that:

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol?) taken regularly raised blood pressure in 34% of subjects.
- Aspirin taken regularly raised blood pressure in 26% of subjects.
- Ibuprofen (Advil?, Motrin?) taken regularly raised blood pressure in 38% of subjects.

These findings are in relation to people who rarely use the drugs. Also, the risk of having high blood pressure increased with frequency of drug use as well. They raise blood pressure by preventing blood vessel expansion and by causing sodium (salt) retention – two major factors in the cause of high blood pressure.

Elevated blood pressure is one of the main factors for heart disease and is one of the most widely treated medical conditions, costing billions in prescription medications every year.

The newer pain medications, known as COX-2 inhibitors are especially worrisome in that they have been shown to significantly raise heart disease risk and cause strokes.

While many physicians prescribe these medicines as first-line treatment for pain, the American Heart Association has advised that doctors use non-drug treatments such as dietary changes, exercise and weight loss before prescribing any of the above drugs due to the study's findings.

At Back in Motion, I treat pain using a variety of ways, depending on the situation. For instance, ibuprofen can be made into a topical cream which is then rubbed onto the sore spot thereby treating only the painful area, rather than taking it is a pill that affects the entire body. Additionally, there are many natural products that are very effective at relieving pain as well.

Come in and find out how to reduce your pain, using something other than these pain medications that have so many side effects!

Dr. Barker Provides Medical Support for Local Events

I am honored to be providing medical support for a series of great races in Portland this summer put on by Run With Paula and the Portland Running Company. These include the Hippie Chick Half Marathon, Helvetia Half Marathon, Midsummer Meltdown, Crawfish Crawl, and Pints to Pasta. All of these races are a great time, and several of them were voted as top races in their respective distance categories in the [2006 City Sports 'Best of 2006' magazine](#).

For more information on these events, go to [runwithpaula](#)

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Supplement Tip:

Glutamine is a popular amino acid supplement. It is the most abundant amino acid in the body, and can be produced in skeletal muscles. Glutamine is very effective at boosting immune function and for healing the gastrointestinal tract.

During physical stress (exercise) the body consumes more glutamine than the skeletal muscle can produce. Progressive muscle breakdown (wasting) can occur as the body tries to meet glutamine requirements.

While many studies do not support the use of glutamine for directly enhancing athletic performance, it is very useful supporting muscle mass and for keeping the immune system strong (intense exercise can predispose one to getting more colds).

Have a sports nutrition question?
[Please ask!](#)

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