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OPTIMIZING YOUR FITNESS AND HEALTH, NATURALLY

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Omega-3 Fatty Acids & Athletes

Omega-3 fatty acids continue to increase in popularity. Also known as essential fatty acids (EFAs), these healthy fats are found in greatest quantities in cold water fish (salmon, sardines, mackerel, etc). Research has shown that in order to gain the maximal health benefits from these fats, one would need to consume fish several times each week. And if you don't enjoy fish, commercial EFAs are widely available in safe, clean preparations.

Among the benefits of EFAs are their anti-inflammatory properties. During exercise, small amounts of traumatic injury occurs in the body - this is part of what makes one sore. Additionally, freeradicals are formed as an exercise-by product, furthering the intensity of pain. EFAs have been shown to counteract the formation of freeradicals and curtail pain resulting from high-intensity workouts. Several studies have shown that EFAs can be used to both prevent and treat exercise-related pain - enough for people to decrease the amount of painkillers they require.

Beyond their use for pain, EFAs can also prevent heart disease (hardening of the arteries, stroke, and heart attacks) and actually lower the amount of 'bad' (LDL) cholesterol in the blood.

Incorporating EFAs into your diet is an ideal way to improve your health. They are available in capsules, however there are a few liquid preparations as well that provide high doses of flavored oil. These have very little 'fish' taste to them and actually taste pleasant!

Calcium Sources

Popular media (and medicine, for that matter) has pounded into our heads that in order to ensure we get enough calcium, one must drink milk. Well, I am here to tell you that milk (and dairy products) are not the ONLY sources of calcium. True, dairy foods contain a high percentage of this vital mineral, but don't feel like you have to pound tons of milk and yogurt to have a strong skeleton, or for fracture recovery.

Most of us need about 1000 milligrams of calcium each day. Women that are very lean, those that have a family history of osteoporosis, and people trying to heal a stress fracture, should consume calcium in the range of 1200 milligrams.

Here are some calcium-rich food sources; compare them to 8 ounces of milk, which contains 300 milligrams.

10 figs = 269 mg
3/4 cup Fortified cereal = 250 mg
2 ounces of sardines = 240mg
6 ounces of turnip greens = 220mg
3 ounces of almonds = 210mg of calcium

Fruits and vegetables contain plenty of calcium; if you eat the recommend 5 servings per day, you are close to achieving the daily requirement. Calcium supplements are a good idea if you are concerned about getting enough in your diet.

Feeling out of balance or confused about all of the diet information out there? Dr. Barker offers nutrition consultations for athletes looking to maximize their energy.

Caffeine Not The Dehydrating Demon

Many healthcare professionals (myself included) have long professed that athletes should avoid caffeine due to its diuretic (water-wasting) nature and its resultant dehydrating effects. Well, a new study that reviewed all of the other caffeine studies shows that caffeine consumption does not actually cause dehydration, or the loss of electrolytes. The study claims that while caffeine is a diuretic, the body will retain the water it would have lost from this effect from the fluid of the beverage. And, those that regularly consume caffeine will adapt to the diuretic effect and thereby lose even less water.

What is the take home message? Even though this study says that caffeine will not dehydrate you, its always a good idea to use some common sense and make sure you still drink enough plain water each day.

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