

Eat like a lineman: The nutrition, not the quantity

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The average woman needs about 1,800 or 2,000 calories to get through her day. For the average man, it is more like 2,400 calories.

But what if you're an athlete? What if you're, say, an offensive lineman on a professional football team?

The more you physically exert yourself, the more calories you need for fuel. The average offensive lineman requires 6,200 to 6,500 calories a day to perform at his peak with sufficient energy throughout an entire game.

Even a lowly quarterback needs 5,200 to 5,400 calories.

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Obviously, athletes don't eat like the rest of us, and elite athletes don't eat like ordinary athletes.

Back in the day, Babe Ruth was known to devour two porterhouse steaks, two salads, two orders of fries and two apple pies a la mode for dinner and then make after-dinner snacks out of a dozen hot dogs washed down with a dozen Coca-Colas.

But those days, perhaps fortunately, are gone. Eating is more of a science now. Today's athletes are likely to follow a health-conscious regimen, and many professional teams hire their own nutritionists and dietitians.

Simon Lusky is the team chef for the St. Louis Cardinals and is also chef and owner of Revel Kitchen. A nutritionist with a degree from the Johnson & Wales culinary school, he tailors his meals to athletes depending on the sport they play, the training they do and even their roles on their team.

Lusky cooks meals and gives nutrition advice to everyone from professional athletes to the people he calls weekend warriors those who may run 5K or 10K races, play soccer or maybe ride a bicycle for exercise to people who are essentially sedentary. Though their needs are different, he has the same mantra for everyone: "I believe in balance overall, a good balance between fat, protein and

carbohydrates."

How this balance is formulated, however, is different for the different lifestyles. "Sedentary people want to watch carbohydrates, but it's vice versa for athletes. For athletes we want to get them carbs, and time them well," he said

Lusky said that a good balance for weekend warriors and many elite athletes, including baseball players, is to consume 50 percent of their calories in carbohydrates, 30 percent in protein and 20 percent in fats.

There are carbohydrates, and then there are carbohydrates. Lusky prefers what he calls "clean" carbohydrates whole grains and unprocessed foods as opposed to, say, white rice and white bread.

"They can have potatoes, but not mashed potatoes with butter and cream. We're roasting them. We can give them potatoes, but not dirtying them up with the other stuff," he said.

Protein is important for everyone, but athletes especially need it because it helps to repair muscles. For his clients and restaurant customers, Lusky focuses on what he calls high-quality proteins, "things that are wild-caught or grass-fed." Fresh vegetables and fruits are also important sources of protein. But he warns that protein is only helpful up to a point.

"They say that you can't metabolize anything more than two grams of protein per pound of body weight. After that, your body can't use it and just flushes it out. Those are calories that make your body work hard and can put a lot of strain on your body, such as your kidneys trying to get rid of it" he said.

For most athletes in training, he recommends a ratio of 1 gram of protein daily for every pound of body weight.

When he is cooking for the Cardinals, Lusky often likes to make healthy, nutrient-dense versions of otherwise unhealthy comfort food. Instead of fried chicken, he makes roasted chicken covered with crushed corn flakes for crunch. Instead of a typically decadent risotto, he makes a version with barley instead of rice, using dehydrated mushrooms for extra flavor and the liquid they reconstituted in as stock.

And for macaroni and cheese, he makes a sauce mostly out of pureed butternut squash. The cheesy flavor comes from a combination of three cheeses, including a tangy goat cheese to offset the sweetness of the squash.

For dessert, he will occasionally splurge and make a bread pudding. He uses less cream than most versions, substituting skim milk and coconut milk, and he replaces some of the sugar with sorghum,

which has a lower glycemic index. But even so, it's bread pudding. It's not going to be great for you.

"I like to tell everyone, including elite athletes, that everyone should lead their life by the 80-20 rule," he said. Eighty percent of the time, you should watch what you eat. In the other 20 percent, you should "live a little."

When Lusky first came to work for the Cardinals, the team's strength and conditioning coach Pete Prinzi told him, "You can't train hard and diet hard. Something will give." Just as it is important to take a day off from exercise to let your body rest, Lusky believes that taking a day off from dieting is important for your mental health. You can't live up to unreal expectations, he said.

What is vital for athletes eating balanced meals is to keep at it, he said.

"Consistency is everything. It is important to keep up what you are doing, even if it is a little bit. Never quit. Something is better than nothing."

HEALTHY/GOOD MACARONI AND CHEESE

Yield: 4 (1-cup) servings

2 cups uncooked whole wheat elbow macaroni

1 1/2 cups butternut squash, see note

1/2 cup chicken or vegetable stock

1/2 cup shredded mozzarella cheese

1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese

2 tablespoons goat cheese (chevre)

Note: If available, use fresh butternut squash split it in half and roast it at 400 degrees for 25 minutes, until soft; then puree the interior orange part. If the squash is not in season, use a 12-ounce package of frozen butternut squash (or winter squash), prepared in the microwave according to instructions on the package.

1. Prepare macaroni according to instructions on the package. Drain.

2. Place pureed squash in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Stir in stock and mozzarella,

Cheddar and goat cheeses. Cook until the cheese is melted and thoroughly incorporated. Combine the macaroni with the sauce.

Per serving: 323 calories; 10 g fat; 6 g saturated fat; 28 mg cholesterol; 17 g protein; 46 g carbohydrate; 1 g sugar; 6 g fiber; 259 mg sodium; 245 mg calcium.

Recipe by Daniel Neman from an idea by Simon Lusky

WILD MUSHROOM BARLEY RISOTTO

Yield: 4 (1-cup) servings

1 ounce dried mushrooms

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 shallot, minced

1 clove garlic, minced

1 cup uncooked barley

1/2 cup dry white wine

1/2 cup shredded Parmesan cheese

Salt and pepper

Chives, for garnish

1. Soak mushrooms in 6 cups of lukewarm water for at least 30 minutes. Strain and reserve the water. Chop mushrooms. Heat mushroom water until it is steaming hot, but not yet simmering.

2. Heat oil over medium heat in a large pot. Add shallot and garlic and cook until shallot is translucent, about 3 to 5 minutes. Add barley and stir until coated with the oil. Raise temperature to medium high, add wine and cook, stirring, until most of the wine is absorbed into the barley.

3. Add one ladle of the hot mushroom liquid and stir constantly until it is nearly all absorbed. Add another ladle and stir constantly until it is nearly all absorbed, and so on. Keep adding liquid and stirring until the barley is tender and cooked through, about 45 minutes. If you run out of the mushroom liquid and the barley is not yet cooked through, add water.

4. Stir in Parmesan cheese. Taste and season with plenty of salt and with pepper. Serve with chopped chives sprinkled on top.

Per serving: 317 calories; 8 g fat; 3 g saturated fat; 13 mg cholesterol; 12 g protein; 45 g carbohydrate; 1 g sugar; 9 g fiber; 209 mg sodium; 172 mg calcium.

Recipe by Daniel Neman from an idea by Simon Lusky

BAKED FRIED CHICKEN

Yield: 4 servings

1 chicken cut up, or 4 breasts or 4 leg quarters

2 eggs

Juice of 1/2 lemon

2 cups crushed corn flakes, see note

1 1/2 teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon black pepper

1 teaspoon paprika

1/2 teaspoon garlic powder

1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper, optional

Note: To crush corn flakes, place in a gallon-size plastic bag. Run over them firmly with a rolling pin.

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil (if you have nonstick aluminum foil, use that).

2. Rinse chicken pieces and pat dry. Beat together eggs and lemon juice in a wide bowl. In another wide, shallow bowl or plate, combine crushed corn flakes, salt, pepper, paprika, garlic powder and optional cayenne pepper.

3. Take each piece of chicken, dip it in the egg wash and then roll it in the corn flake mixture. Place on prepared baking sheet.

4. Roast in oven 30 minutes, turn the pieces, then continue to cook until done, 20 to 30 minutes more.

Per serving: 479 calories; 21 g fat; 6 g saturated fat; 150 mg cholesterol; 44 g protein; 26 g carbohydrate; 3 g sugar; 1 g fiber; 1,192 mg sodium; 30 mg calcium.

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