

Alleviate Sports Pain With a Proper Diet

Learn how to reduce inflammation with a special sports nutrition diet that works for your lifestyle.

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Weekend warriors and true athletes alike know that pain often comes with the territory. For most, the first stop is the medicine cabinet, but how many realize that additional relief can be found in the kitchen with proper sports nutrition?

Sports Nutrition: Injury Aid

When it comes to injuries, there are two kinds: acute and chronic. "Acute sports injuries such as a sprained ankle require immediate medical attention and anti-inflammatory medications (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs [NSAIDS]), as well as the famous R.I.C.E. acronym (rest, ice, compression, elevation)," says Janet Bond Brill, PhD, RD, adjunct professor at both the Robert Stempel School of Public Health at Florida International University and at the University of Miami and author of *Cholesterol DOWN*.

Chronic injuries, on the other hand, which can result from repetitive motions like the constant pounding on the knee joints of a marathon runner, can benefit from a special sports nutrition diet designed to reduce inflammation.

Sports Nutrition: What Foods Can Reduce Inflammation?

Omega-3 fatty acids found in fish oil, specifically docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), along with alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) in certain plants and nut oils are the most potent anti-inflammatory foods.

Omega-3 fatty acids can easily be added to your diet by eating fatty fish such as salmon, tuna, or herring, while ALA is present in some nuts and vegetable oils.

Other anti-inflammatory foods you can easily incorporate into your diet include ground flaxseeds, flaxseed oil, walnuts, dark green leafy vegetables, and canola oil.

"When it comes to fat, you truly are what you eat," says Dr. Brill. "In the body, a biochemical transformation of essential fatty acids into eicosanoids (hormone-like substances that the body uses for multiple physiological purposes) occurs. Some eicosanoids provoke inflammation and others are anti-inflammatory. The balance in the type of eicosanoids your cells produce shifts depending on the type of fat that you eat. Eat more omega-3 and less omega-6 and your cells will produce the more healthful anti-inflammatory eicosanoids."

Omega-6 is found in many processed foods; cooking oils such as sunflower, safflower, corn, cottonseed, and soybean; egg yolks; and meat, especially organ meat.

Sports Nutrition: What Is the Recommended Intake?

In general, a healthy diet strives for a good balance of omega-3 fatty acids to omega-6 fatty acids, with a ratio of approximately one omega-3 to four omega-6s. Unfortunately, research has shown many Americans consume closer to 11 to 30 times more omega-6 fatty acids than omega-3s.

To get these numbers in better alignment, Brill recommends 3 grams of ALA per day (the amount in two tablespoons of ground flaxseeds) and 0.65 grams of fish omega-3s (EPA/DHA), which is equal to the amount of two servings of fatty fish per week.

Sports Nutrition: Easy Ways to Add These Foods Into Your Diet

Flaxseeds can easily be sprinkled into the mix when making pancakes, waffles, muffins, or cookies or can be stirred into hot oatmeal. Toss some dark green leafy vegetables into a salad instead of iceberg lettuce. Consider cooking with canola oil and snack on walnuts instead of chips or pretzels.

The good news doesn't stop there. Not only can these foods help injury-related inflammation, they can keep inflammation of all kinds at bay, including heart disease. And isn't that one of the reasons we exercise in the first place?



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