HIGH PERFORMANCE EATING (PART 2)

In Part 1, we looked at how much to eat. Based on that information alone, you could apparently live on a diet of ice-cream and doughnuts. However, this is unlikely to give high-performance results!

We all know by now that you should eat a well balanced diet, avoid saturated fats, and eat plenty of fruit, vegetables and complex carbohydrates.

For high performance, you also need to think about getting the right micro-nutrients. These are the chemicals that your body needs for growth, repair and movement. You need essential amino acids to maintain your soft tissues; minerals to build bone and connective tissues, and to allow muscle action; and vitamins to construct hormones and enzymes.

Essential amino acids are proteins. If you eat meat, fish or dairy products, you are getting Class 1 proteins. These contain all the essential amino acids. You can also eat combinations of vegetables to form Class 1 proteins, such as rice and peas, or tortillas and beans.

Minerals come from a variety of sources. Iron is vital to everyone, but especially to athletes who destroy haemoglobin quickly, and can become iron deficient. Top sources of iron are red meat and sardines. Vegetable sources of iron include soybeans and spinach, but you should consume vitamin C at the same time to absorb the iron effectively. Also, avoid drinking tea or coffee with or close to meals, as tannins reduce absorbance of these 'non-heme' sources of iron.

Other important minerals are calcium, for bone and cartilage formation, and also essential for muscle contraction; magnesium, for muscle relaxation; potassium and sodium, to maintain cell hydration (yes, athletes need salt!). There are many others, of course. To get a good mix of minerals, eat a wide range of vegetables, seeds (especially pumpkin and sesame seeds) and nuts.

Vitamins also come from a range of foods. So long as you eat a well balanced diet, you'll probably get all the vitamins you need. Especially good sources of many vitamins are dark coloured vegetables, eggs, and oily fish. Vitamins A, D, E and K are fat soluble. This is one reason why you shouldn't reduce fat intake below about 1g per kg of body weight.

If you're interested in finding out more about the best foods to eat, a very good resource is http://www.whfoods.com/foodstoc.php.