

SportsNutrition

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The Athlete's Kitchen Hot Nutrition Topics from the American College of Sports Medicine

The American College of Sports Medicine ([ACSM](#)) is a professional organization for exercise scientists, sports medicine doctors, sports dietitians, sports psychologists, and other health professionals, educators & researchers who work with athletic people. ACSM's Annual Meeting is a hotspot for the latest sports nutrition news. This year, 4,000+ members gathered in Salt Lake City (May 26-29, 2026) to present their research and discuss current trends and topics. Here are a few sports nutrition highlights that might be of interest.

Weight: When people gain weight, they also gain muscle as the body adapts to be able to carry the heavier load. Hence, people with obesity tend to have a lot of muscle—more than leaner people! The quality of the muscle, however, in terms of strength and power, can be diminished if they are not physically fit. When both athletes and people with obesity lose weight, they similarly lose muscle, in part because they have less weight to carry around, and also because the body, when in energy deficit, breaks down muscle for fuel and does not have the energy needed to make new muscle. Among people who use GLP-1 weight loss meds, about 25% of the weight lost can be muscle. While that is to be expected, it can also be lessened by doing resistance exercise. Hence, strength training should be a fundamental part of every weight reduction program—especially among dieters who eat minimal calories, athletes and GLP-1 users alike.

• **Gut issues:** Athletes commonly struggle with gastrointestinal (GI) issues, ranging from nausea to diarrhea. Athletes who participate in running sports that jostle the intestines or hot-weather exercise for prolonged bouts are particularly prone to GI distress. One way to resolve the problem is to train the gut by routinely exercising after having eaten a meal or ingested a lot of pre-exercise water. A second way to minimize GI distress is to eat foods low in specific kinds of carbohydrates referred to as FODMAPs (Fermentable Oligo-, Di-, Monosaccharides And Polyols) for a few days before an important athletic event. Foods high in FODMAPS that athletes commonly enjoy (and might want to avoid pre-event) include onion, garlic, apple, and broccoli. Low FODMAP foods include rice, potato, and all animal sources of protein. Lists of high and low FODMAP foods are readily available at [KateScarlata.com](#). Kate is a RD and FODMAP expert.

• **Sleep:** Sleep is an important part of a training program. Sleep is restorative and realigns your circadian rhythms. Many athletes suffer from sleep deprivation due to early morning or late evening workouts, travel to competitions that disrupts normal sleep patterns, and the time demands of work, social life, and training. Given each cell in the body has its own circadian rhythm, sleep is important to enable the body to function normally. Hence, you want to establish a routine so that, as often as possible, you eat, exercise, and sleep at similar times each day. This can help both with performance as well as overall health, appetite regulation, and well-being. People with

disrupted circadian rhythms commonly experience more health issues (heart disease, diabetes, hunger that contributes to weight gain), with women being more sensitive than men to circadian disruption.

• To build muscles, you need to lift weights, do push-ups, or participate in some type of resistance exercise. Consuming a high protein diet or taking creatine (or even hormones such as testosterone) does NOT build muscle. As exercise physiologist Stu Phillips explained, strength training is what "bakes the cake"; creatine is the sprinkles on the top.

The best strengthening exercises are the ones you enjoy. If you prefer to lift lighter weights than heavier ones, that's okay. Doing 20 to 25 reps of lighter weights will give you the same gains as lifting 8 to 12 reps of heavier weights. The key is to lift until the muscle is fatigued.

Athletes vary in the amount of muscle they can build; some are "hard gainers." In general, men gain more muscle than women, but that is relatively speaking. A woman can gain the same percentage of muscle as a man. That is, with a strength training program, a one percent gain for a 150-lb. male would be 1.5 pounds., but only 1 pound for a 100-lb. female.

According to exercise physiologist Trent Stellingwerff, if you feel as though you've hit a plateau when lifting weights, know that the body adapts. Your best bet is to stay consistent with your program and fret not about "changing things up." For more information about the most effective ways to build muscle, take a look at ACSM's [2026 Position Stand on Resistance Training Prescription for Muscle Function, Hypertrophy and Physical Performance](#).

• Gut microbes influence your muscles and your ability to exercise—and vice versa. Exercise influences your gut's microbiome, which influences your immune system and overall health. Ultrarunners and Ironmen triathletes who do hours more exercise than most of us have higher amounts of health-protective gut microbes. These microbes thrive on fiber-rich foods such as whole grains (brown rice, oatmeal) and abundant fiber-rich fruit (berries, apple) and veggies (sweet potato, peas). Fiber is particularly important as you age, given the robustness of the microbiome tends to diminish with aging.

• Given the plethora of trendy info about nutrition supplements, many athletes are taking products that make amazing claims but have no science to back them up. Buyer beware: the nutrition supplement industry is poorly regulated! Supplement makers do not have to prove their products are safe. Only after a product has come on the market and created health issues does the FDA step in.

Nancy Clark MS RD CSSD counsels both fitness exercisers and competitive athletes in the Boston-area (617-962-4382). Her best-selling *Sports Nutrition Guidebook* is a popular resource. For more information, visit [NancyClarkRD.com](#).