

Stay Strong Forever

What about nutrition?

There seems to be even more confusion about how to eat for good health and fitness than there is about how to work out. It seems like everywhere you turn, you see an article or advertisement for different diets and nutritional supplements. The problem is that much of the information is contradictory, confusing, or outright lies designed to separate you from your hard-earned money.

And for many people, the thought of health eating conjures up images of being hungry all the time and never being free to enjoy some culinary indulgences. But it doesn't have to be that way, and in my opinion it shouldn't be. I believe you can provide your body with the good nutrition it needs to function well, and still enjoy yourself.

The Stay Strong Forever program is designed to *add* to the quality of your life, not become an obsession that *detracts* from it. And that goes for both exercise and nutrition.

The purpose of this section is to provide you with the basic nutrition facts you need to know and apply to get the most out of your Stay Strong Forever workouts, while still enjoying the foods that you don't want to live without.

The essential nutrients

There are six essential nutrients which must be consumed every day, in the right amounts, for optimum health and fitness. (These aren't my rules, this is just the way the human body works). They are:

- Protein
- Carbohydrates
- Fats
- Vitamins
- Minerals
- Water

Protein comes from the Greek word *proteios*, meaning "primary" or "holding the first place." It is necessary for building muscle, and repair and maintenance of many tissues in the body. Including adequate protein in every meal should be your first consideration to support your strength building efforts.

Recent research indicates that protein needs for older adults who engage in strength training are higher than previously thought - about 1.6 grams of protein per kilogram (2.2 pounds) of body weight per day.

For example, I weigh 170 pounds, so to determine my daily protein needs I would convert my weight to kilograms (170 divided by 2.2), which is 77.27 kg, and multiply that by 1.6, which equals 123.62, which I round up to 124 grams of protein needed per day.

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Foods high in protein include meats, poultry, fish, dairy products (the low-fat kind are healthier), and eggs.

Carbohydrates fuel your strength training efforts and give you the energy to work at your maximum potential. Carbohydrates are the primary source of fuel for your muscles, your central nervous system, and especially your brain. This is why people on extremely low carbohydrate diets are often irritable and forgetful.

All carbohydrates are eventually broken down into the simple sugar glucose, some of which is transported through your bloodstream to your muscles, where it is stored in the form of muscle glycogen for future use. This stored energy is utilized during high intensity muscular contractions.

If you short-change yourself on carbohydrates, you will not have the fuel necessary to generate maximum intensity during your workouts.

Carbohydrate-rich foods also provide many essential vitamins and minerals, as well as other disease-preventing compounds known as phytochemicals.

Carbohydrate-rich foods include grains, bread, fruits, vegetables, pasta, and beans.

Fiber is a form of carbohydrate. Research shows that a high fiber diet can reduce the risk of heart disease, many types of cancer, and type II diabetes. 25-35 grams of fiber per day is the recommended daily allowance.

Read the nutritional labels of the carbohydrate-rich foods you purchase. Under the "Total Carbohydrate" heading, you will see "Dietary Fiber"- the higher that number is, the better. Packaging can be very deceiving, so do your due diligence by checking the label, and you will be creating a more nutritious diet for yourself.

Fats are used by your body to provide long-term energy, protect your organs, and insulate you from the elements. Although your body does require some fat to function properly, there will normally be enough present in the protein foods listed above to serve this purpose. Excessive saturated fat intake (fat from animal sources) is related to many diseases.

One gram of fat has more than twice the calories (9) as one gram of protein (4) or carbohydrate (4). So for those trying to lose weight, cutting down on high fat foods will be an efficient method of reducing daily calories.

Examples of high fat foods include butter, many salad dressings, oils, mayonnaise, cheese, nuts, and fried foods.

Vitamins and minerals are referred to as micro-nutrients because they are needed by your body in very small quantities on a daily basis. Recommended daily allowances of vitamins and minerals are mostly measured in milligrams, as opposed to grams for carbohydrates, proteins and fats. Vitamins and minerals serve as catalysts in many important physiological processes.

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Consuming a reasonably well-balanced diet is important for getting the vitamins and minerals you need. Excess vitamins and minerals are passed off in the urine, except fat-soluble vitamins, which are stored in the body and can be harmful if consumed in large quantities.

Water is, of course, essential to human life. In a survival situation, you could go a few weeks without food, but you would die without water after a few days. Many people do not drink enough water every day, walking around semi-dehydrated with a resulting lack of energy.

Your body is actually composed of mostly water, including your muscles, which are about 70% water. Every physiological subsystem in your body operates in a fluid medium; lack of sufficient water will adversely affect all of them, including those utilized in your strength training program. Make it a priority to drink ½ to 1 gallon of water throughout the day, every day.

The balancing act

Eating is one of life's simple pleasures, and as such an essential component of living a full life, which is central to the Stay Strong Forever philosophy.

But if we overindulge and eat too much consistently, the extra calories cause us to add body fat. And carrying too much body fat makes it harder to live a full active life and encourages many disease processes.

So the balancing act we have to figure out is: how do we enjoy eating, get our essential nutrients in, and not get too fat? I offer 2 simple rules:

- 1. Get what you need, then have what you want** – Prioritize the essential nutrients and make sure your daily diet has those covered first. Once you get your essential nutrients in, then it's ok to have what you want, regardless of the nutritional value of your treat. How much of what you want is ok? See #2.
- 2. Everything in moderation; don't overeat** – Once you've gotten your essential nutrients in for the day and it's time to have what you want, make sure it's only in moderation. Taking in all the essential nutrients you need that day is not a green light to go crazy on tasty treats; don't deprive yourself, but be aware of your total calorie intake for the day. Both highly nutritious foods and junk food contain calories, and if your daily total is too high you'll add unwanted body fat.

Of course, eating habits vary among different people for many reasons – personal tastes and preferences, cultural influences, allergies and sensitivities, etc. The key to mastering the nutritional balancing act is to keep it simple, implement these guidelines, and figure out how to consistently take in the nutrients your body needs within the framework of whatever eating habits you have. As long as you get your essential nutrients in and enjoy eating without overeating, you're doing it right; how you get there is up to you.

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Post-workout nutrition

Recall from our discussion on carbohydrates that muscle glycogen is a form of stored energy contained within your muscles. When you train with a high level of intensity, a good deal of this energy will be used up - kind of like squeezing all the water out of a wet sponge. And just like a real sponge, the best time to re-saturate it is right after you have just wrung it out.

For the first 30 to 60 minutes immediately following an intense workout, there is a window of time where your muscles are more receptive to energy replenishment and rebuilding. The way to take advantage of this situation is to consume a high protein, carbohydrate-rich snack within the first hour after your Stay Strong Forever workout. Many experts believe that about 20 grams of protein in this snack is optimal for hastening the recovery and rebuilding process.

There are many nutrition shakes and bars on the market with 20+ grams of protein that can offer a convenient way to get your post-workout snack. You could also try 8 ounces of low-fat milk, chocolate milk or yogurt; a sandwich with a low-fat protein like chicken or turkey; or a smoothie made with protein powder.