

Cobba's Second Law of Exercising: Make Appropriate Nutrition a Priority

You may remember that my first law of exercising is 'Do No Harm'. Following this law is crucial, as you seek to remain healthy.

You may be interested to find that the laws concerning exercise have a dietary component, and this is to drum home the point that you can never achieve your optimal performance by exercise alone. No matter your goal, you will need to adopt an appropriate meal plan to cross the finish line. A look at the food pyramid that was modified in 2005 (we will discuss this at a later date) places a huge premium on exercising. Indeed, exercising and nutrition are inter-related, and you neglect one at your own peril.

If you look at people's limiting factors in terms of their ability to be healthy, to lose fat, and to gain muscle, there are essentially only three main limits, and these are:

- Genetic makeup
- Physical activity patterns
- Nutritional habits.

Everything falls into one of these categories. Good nutrition will feed muscle and shed fat. It will improve recovery and mood so that you can exercise harder, longer and more frequently. Good nutrition will also help you get the body that you have been dreaming of, or the one that you saw on the cover of your favourite magazine.

The goals of every nutrition programme should be:

- To improve body composition
- To improve health
- To improve performance.

All three points stated above may seem quite vague, but over time we will discuss how to make our goals SMART (specific, measureable, achievable, realistic and time bound). A majority of people are working out with aesthetics in mind. We want to lose fat, gain muscle, achieve a flat 'stomach', and generally look great naked.

As a result of these strong motivators, we are easily lured into a world of powerful drugs, invasive and risky surgeries, and ridiculous crash diets. These strategies, while sometimes temporarily improving the way you may look in the mirror, can sacrifice your health and well being in the long run. It is therefore important that we do not only focus on aesthetic aspects, but in addition, we should work at decreasing bad cholesterol and elevating good cholesterol; reducing the risk of diabetes; reducing body fat and increasing muscle; making our heart stronger; and so on.

Getting Appropriate Help

If you have a medical condition such as diabetes, heart or kidney failure, DO NOT get dietary or nutritional help from diet sheets or self-proclaimed experts. Make sure you talk to a qualified dietician. Most people do not have the requisite skill to give you an appropriate dietary plan.

Eating a Balanced Meal Always

You may have come across protein diets, Atkins diet, South Beach diet, weightwatchers, etc... The list goes on and on, and whenever we care to ask, there is definitely a new diet on the block. The plain truth is that we need all the components of a balanced meal to be healthy. What matters most is the type and quantities of the diet. Fat has been condemned over the years, but we definitely need to have the right types of fat in our diet, as we need fat for several body functions.

Getting the Quantities Right

In general, the quantity and proportion of food that you need depends on your gender, metabolism and level of physical activity. To get the quantities right, we need to be aware of the following:

- Most women have a lower metabolism than their male counterparts, so their calorie input should be lower than that for men, even if they have similar levels of activity.
- Since our metabolism slows with age, we should expect to put in fewer calories as we reach our 30s.
- Someone trying to put on muscles should not eat ‘like an ant’, since no matter the weights you work out with, you will not be able to grow the appropriate muscles by starving yourself.
- We expect sedentary workers (mostly sitting, with little movement) to consume less energy than those whose work involves a lot of physical activity. Please note that ‘brain work’ falls under the sedentary category: little wonder many people gain weight during examination week. If your work involves a lot of physical activity and you eat what a sedentary worker should, you lose energy and your performance will drop in the course of the day.

The Place of Supplementation

I am certain we all agree that it is best to get all our nutrients from our meals. Sometimes we either do not have access to adequate nutrients from fruits, vegetables, and so on, or we do not have the time to consume the recommended portions. Supplements should not be thrown at everyone, but they should be decided on a need basis. Essentially, one should be assessed by a professional, and supplements should be recommended when necessary. There is really no need to put together a supplement cocktail for fear of losing out on some benefit. First watch your diet, and then change your buying patterns if necessary. Finally, seek professional help to determine if you need supplementation, and which types to take. Remember that though it is rare,

we could have an overdose of certain vitamins, and the diagnosis is often not like a walk in the park.

Some of us try hard to avoid eating certain foods, but we still purchase them to serve to our visitors or give to our children. A line of caution here: ‘when we carry food or keep it at home, we will eventually EAT it’, and I know this for sure. Your guess is as good as mine.

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References:

- Nutrition: The Complete Guide. By John Berardi, Ryan Andrews
- www.healthclubsg.com