

Wrestler's Diet

With the start of every season, there is always renewed interest in nutrition. Whether the focus is on dropping to a lower weight or staying strong through a proper diet, wrestlers always have many questions on what they should eat.

Judy Nelson, Nutrition Coordinator for the United States Olympic Committee helps America's elite athletes achieve success at the highest levels of competition. USA Wrestling's coaching staff relies on her expertise on a regular basis. Her suggestions should be high priorities for wrestlers and coaches trying to establish proper nutrition in a daily diet.

Step one: Switch to skim

Switching to skim milk can make a dramatic difference in caloric and fat intake for any individual. In an eight ounce glass of reduced fat 2% milk there is 122 calories with 4.7 grams of fat. In low fat 1% milk, there is 102 calories and 2.5 grams of fat. A wrestler that switches to skim milk takes in 86 calories and .4 grams of fat per eight ounce glass.

Clearly there is a benefit in switching over to skim milk. An eight ounce glass is generally smaller than what most people consume in a sitting these days. So, the benefit can be even further magnified.

Step two: Lots of fruit

In speaking to Ms Nelson about the importance of fruit in a diet, she sees benefits varying from fruit to fruit. "Bananas and oranges are very important because of the Vitamin C they provide. Melons are high in Vitamin A and blueberries are also great." So, when adding fruit to a diet variety can be an important factor to consider.

Step three: Juice over pop

Pop provides nothing of value to for a wrestler's body to run off of. There are no nutrients to digest. Further, youthful consumers have gotten hooked on oversized drinks. A wrestler should definitely consider the numbers before they grab a soda. Eight ounces of pop has about 140 calories. The "average" pop serving has increased in size, with many people drinking as much as 24 ounces of pop in one sitting. Using a caloric intake of 4200 calories a day, 24 ounces of pop would be 420 calories or nearly 20 percent of the energy intake for the day. Throw in the fact that it has no nutritional value, coaches and wrestlers should see that fruit juice is a much better beverage to reach for.

Step four: Baked Potatoes

Baked potatoes are an easily prepared food that should become a staple in a wrestler's diet. Don't forget to eat the skin though. According to Nelson, the baked potato has almost no fat and a minimal amount of sodium with a good supply of complex carbohydrates.

Of course a wrestler's nutritional training can run afoul if the potato is loaded down with condiments like butter and sour cream. A wrestling secret in eating a potato is adding water to the potato. Wrestlers know that baked potatoes can be dry, so the best thing to do is re-hydrate it. After breaking it open and smashing it with a fork pour a little more water on it and it won't taste as dry.

Step five: Maintain Variety.

Once again Judy Nelson's nutritional point is very simple. "No one food has everything a wrestler needs." Variety in food, even in a specific food group is important. Don't rely on one food, to supply all of the vitamins and nutrients needed for day to day health. Remove the junk from the diet, but maintain variety.

Step six: Lots of water.

Staying properly hydrated is difficult for the average person. For an active athlete it can be very hard to stay hydrated without a conscious effort. Nelson offers that fluid needs can be estimated at 1 milliliter per calorie. So in a 3000 calorie a day diet an individual would need to three liters of fluid.

Generally speaking water is overlooked as an important part of good nutrition. One old standard is 64 ounces of water consumption a day. Although Nelson states that this is not very scientific, it is probably well above what most wrestlers are consuming daily. Clearly wrestlers work hard and perspire significantly so wrestlers should work to replace the lost fluid. Water replacement is a critical part of a nutritional plan for a wrestler.

Step seven: The secret of egg whites

Wrestlers need to understand where hunger pains come from. Foods that are high in sugar, for example, are broken down quickly after consumption. So, while a candy bar might taste good, its satisfaction is limited because it is broken down before other foods that contain higher amounts of protein.

If wrestlers want to maintain a fuller feeling for a longer duration they need to look to having a diet with good protein. Egg whites are a common source of quality protein. Additionally, egg whites contain no fat. Throw the yolk away, that's a whole other topic.

Wrestlers can prepare egg whites easily by boiling up a dozen eggs and storing them in the refrigerator. Egg whites contain about 3.5 grams of protein each. Encourage wrestlers to make use of this source of protein.

Step eight: High fiber is highly important

Again variety is certainly important for wrestlers focusing on proper nutrition. Fiber is one part of a good daily diet. Judy Nelson encourages wrestlers to make a high fiber cereal part of their daily food consumption. Cereals like All Bran and breads can be good sources of fiber. In checking the nutrition panel on cereal or bread try to find a product that has at least three grams of fiber per serving. **Don't be deceived by the packaging or the name,** make sure to check the nutritional outline.

Step Nine: Don't rely on meat

Protein is a highly important element for good nutrition for athletes. But a person does not have to rely only on meat to get good sources of protein. There are many soy-based products and dairy products that can work just as well as red meat does for protein. Wrestlers should consider trying legumes such as **black beans** and **pinto beans** as protein sources. Again variety can help in nutrition and make it easier to maintain a positive outlook when a person watches what they eat.

Step Ten: Plan for after the weigh-in

Wrestlers after making weight need to focus on foods that will help recover and won't adversely effect performance. Foods with fat are definitely slower digesting. Carbohydrates can be easier on a wrestler's stomach. Foods like **applesauce**, **crackers**, and **cereal** can be easily digested and aid in recovery. After making weight don't let a lapse in judgement effect your performance, plan ahead and shoot for smaller portions spread throughout the tournament day.

Reaching a high level of achievement requires mental focus on all aspects of a wrestler's performance. Proper nutrition can be an area that can really help a wrestler attain their goals. Of course being a wrestler, in a junk food culture will hold anyone back. So, please take the ten simple suggestions to heart. Make use of the same nutritional training that athletes in the Olympics rely on.