



NUTRITION FOR SQUASH PLAYERS

by Mike McCoy



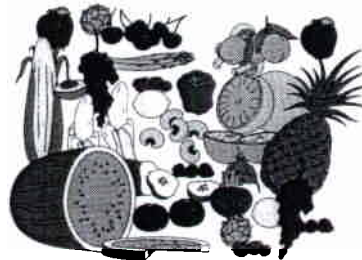
These notes form the basis of a presentation given by Michael McCoy, B.Sc., M. App. Sci., to the Professional Squash Coaches Association of Victoria on Sunday 22nd May, 1994.

The training programs of all types of athletes create special nutritional needs. To get the greatest return for all those hours spent training, you must also consider the ingredients of an optimal training diet.

All athletes, regardless of the sport they play or the level at which they compete, can be fully rewarded in terms of both performance and good health, only once they have adequately addressed the nutritional demands their sport and lifestyle places on them.

The following is a list of basic guidelines for everyday nutrition that should be met in order to gain the most out of your squash training and competition:

1. Achieve and maintain appropriate body weight and body fat for your sporting requirements. Modify your diet, where necessary, to accommodate for the needs of weight gain (height or muscle mass) or weight loss (body fat).
2. Satisfy all nutrient needs, remembering that the requirement for some nutrients will be increased due to the demands of heavy training.
3. Promote recovery between training sessions/competitions by the rapid replacement of fluids and fuel (carbohydrate) stores.
4. Consider long-term dietary requirements for good health.
5. Experiment during training with the dietary practices you intend to use in games and tournaments (e.g: pre-game meals, meals in between games, the use of sports drinks during games).



The focus of this article is on the particular, nutritional demands of playing. It considers what you need to do to prepare for and recover from competition, as well as how to best deal with the variable schedules encountered during tournaments. But the message contained within the above guidelines and in the details to follow can also serve as a basis for meeting your nutritional needs during training.

Recovery From the Final Training Session

In many ways, this is the most important meal for the week. Your nutritional preparation for the up-coming game or tournament should start as soon as possible after your last training session. It takes up to 48 hours for your body to fully restore its reserves of carbohydrate and, because of this, strenuous training should not ideally be scheduled in the 48 hours prior to a game.

Your muscles contain most of the body's carbohydrate store - a practical place to keep it since, when you exercise, these carbohydrates provide much of the energy needed for continued muscular activity.

This important meal should be high in carbohydrate and low in fat, as should be the case throughout this week. Pasta and rice dishes perhaps most obviously meet these requirements, but you should also be careful how the meal is prepared and what sauces go with it. Avoid fried rice or stir-fried noodles, and choose non-dairy sauces to cut down on fats. Bolognese sauce, for example, can be quite high in fat, especially if fatty cheese is sprinkled over the top. Eating protein in this meal is fine as long as it is low in fat and plays a minor role to the carbohydrates.

You will also need to restore body fluids and electrolytes, the amount depending on how much you sweated and drank during training. Don't rely on your thirst to gauge how much fluid you've lost - it's likely to result in an underestimation. Use the scales to weigh yourself before and after training (take the sweaty clothes off first). Every kilogram lost during training is roughly equivalent to a litre of sweated fluid you will need to replace.

Water is the obvious choice for fluid replacement, but sports drinks like **Isosport** not only provide the fluids you need but are also a good source of carbohydrates. Avoid alcohol and caffeine since these have a diuretic effect and will worsen dehydration rather than assist with fluid recovery.

The Pre-Game Meal

In the hours before a game or tournament, you shouldn't need to do anything more than lightly top up your carbohydrate reserves. Eat whatever you're comfortable with, as long as it is low in fat. Breakfast cereals and toast make good choices.

Again, the timing of the meal is important. Large meals should be finished 2 to 3 hours before the game, smaller ones 1 to 2 hours before. It's important that the meal contain little that can't be used as fuel in the game. Extra kilojoules in the form of fats and proteins should be limited since they will slow down digestion.

Contrary to normal dietary practice, high fibre foods should also be limited in this meal to reduce its bulk. Sports drinks like **Isosport**, **Gatorade** and **Sportsplus** or liquid meal supplements like **Sustagen** or **Exceed Sports Nutrition Supplement** are appropriate for a pre-game meal and are easily digested.

Just Before the Game

You shouldn't need and probably won't want to eat anything in the hour before a game starts. If you feel thirsty after you've had your pre-game meal, drink water only.

Don't drink sports drinks, soft drinks, juices or cordial even if they're available.

Carbohydrates consumed in the hour before exercise may have the effect of actually lowering carbohydrate (glucose) levels in the blood by the time the game starts, the opposite of what you're trying to achieve.

During the Game

Once the game starts, the best way to maintain body fluid and carbohydrate levels is with 125 to 250 ml (about one cup full) of sports drink every 15 to 20 minutes throughout the match.

Don't wait until you're thirsty to start drinking and in hot weather, you may need to drink extra water in addition to the same amount of sports drink.

If sports drinks aren't available, fruit and water, or dilute cordial are alternatives, although less effective.

During Tournaments

During tournaments you may be called on to play more than one match per day and/or many matches over consecutive days.

If you are to perform at your best in the next match, you need to replace fluids and carbohydrates as quickly as possible. Research has shown again that the timing of carbohydrate

ingestion is of great importance in optimising the recovery of your body's carbohydrate reserves.

Consuming carbohydrates immediately after exercise restores muscle carbohydrate reserves almost twice as quickly as when carbohydrate intake is delayed for two hours.

If sports drinks like **Isosport** are available, they are ideal since they help you to replace fluids as well as provide you with rapidly available carbohydrates.

Solutions with a higher carbohydrate content, like **Lucozade** and **Exceed High Carbohydrate Source** are also effective in assisting with post-exercise carbohydrate and fluid replacement, although their higher carbohydrate content renders them inappropriate for use during a match.

After the Game/Tournament

At the end of the match the cycle starts again. The sooner you restore carbohydrate and fluid reserves, the quicker and more complete will be your recovery.

Proper nutrition is an important ingredient in making sure you get the most out of your preparation. To ignore it is to give yourself less than the best opportunity of performing at your peak.

FURTHER READING

The complete guide to food for sports performance. L. Burke and M. McCoy, Allen and Unwin, 1992.

Food for Sport. K. Inge and P. Brukner, Heinemann Australia, 1986

Food Facts. (2nd Edition) D. Briggs and M. Wahlqvist. Penguin, 1988.

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