

# You are what you eat!

## Developing a nutrition plan instead of a diet.

By Allistair McCaw

“ You are what you eat” they say, so does that make you a chicken if you eat poultry? Maybe not, but what you eat definitely determines the way you look and feel about yourself.

Lets start this article with probably the most overused and misunderstood word in the English vocabulary: Diet.

The Encarta world English dictionary describes the word diet as ‘ food or drink that is intended for people to lose weight’.

**Newsflash:** Forget dieting. It doesn't work. The problem with dieting is that it has to end at some point. Excuse my use of pun, but if you look at the first three letters of the word its 'die'.

Instead of dieting, look at your nutrition plan as an eating blueprint for life. Something that lasts longer. Finding the balance between healthy eating, exercise and the foods you love will allow you to live and perform better, be it at work, sport or life's daily activities.

From my own personal experience as a former professional triathlete, I viewed my nutrition plan as probably the biggest contributing factor in my overall performance. I saw food not only as a source of energy, but also as 'brainfood' or mental focus if you like. Ever seen how moody, cranky and irrational you become when you're hungry?

My 15 years experience as a performance coach working with top level athletes like tennis players or golfers have made me realize how much they underestimate the importance of refueling the body and brain every 10 -15 minutes whilst performing. At professional level the difference between winning and losing, making 100 dollars or a million dollars can be one single lapse of concentration or focus. I encourage my tennis players to eat and drink every single time they sit down at a changeover. Even a drink and small bite of an energy bar can be enough to keep the body and brain fueled.

Call me extreme, but I always believed that what i put in my body either strengthened or weakened me. Before putting something in my mouth, I would ask myself the question: Will this take me a step closer to my goal or a step further?

Before you call me crazy, maybe you might understand me a little better if I say that in a sport like triathlon, if you're over 7% bodyfat you have no chance of being anywhere near the best.

I always knew my exact weight even before standing on the scale, I learned to know my body so well, even my waking heart rate, I could tell before even taking it first thing in the morning!

I also saw my eating habits as a reflection of my discipline level. When I was going through a bad patch, I would find myself going off my normal healthy nutrition plan and onto the MTV and McDonalds plan.

To improve performance, be it on the field, in the workplace or at home, you need to have a nutrition plan that suits your lifestyle. Here's the good news: You don't need to be like I was and live like a sporting monk, you simply need to make some small adjustments and better choices.

Below I have listed my 6 best tips and things I have learned along the way on improving your nutrition plan and lifestyle.

### **1. Plan ahead**

Start with making a list of all the healthy options you can think of and that could help you improve your energy and lifestyle demands. When you make a specific list, you are more likely to get exactly what you

need when you go shopping for food. Foods such as fruit, vegetables, lean meats and fibers should come to mind.

Secondly, plan your meals and snacks ahead of time. Finding healthy food on the road can be a nightmare, so if you're going to be away all day, make sure you prepare your food before you leave home. Make healthy choices that keep you well nourished and energized throughout the day.

## **2. The 80/20 rule**

There is no perfect 'diet' or 'nutrition plan', so stop putting pressure on yourself. Nobody is perfect and no eating plan will be either. We can all have lapses from time to time, that's normal, but letting it become a habit of having a frappacino with whipped cream everyday is going off the road a bit. Aim for the 80/20 rule. That means staying on track 80% of the time and 'letting go' 20% to enjoy the 'forbidden foods'.

Feeling guilty about having a treat now and again isn't worth it. Allow yourself to have that chocolate when you feel you've deserved it. Believe me, if you are following the 80/20 rule you won't see a difference. Also your body and mind needs treated from time to time.

## **3. Smarter, better options**

Some of you might have read my article I wrote entitled "*Small changes, big results*". In this article I talk about making small minuet changes over a period of time and gradually results come along which seem effortless, but pay huge dividends,

It's the same story every year, brash new years resolutions like "no more drinking" or "I'm going to train 7 days a week" are heard. Don't be a victim!

Start with one less sugar in your coffee, low fat instead of full cream milk and order the sauce separate to the pasta. These small changes are what I mean when I talk about smarter choices that can make a difference to how you feel and look.

## **4. Forget what your mother told you**

Instead of the traditional three big meals per day we were brought up on, eat smaller, more often. Aim to have 6 - 8 smaller meals per day. Here's why:

By eating smaller portions more often spread across the day, allows you to burn fat more efficiently and provides the body with a steady energy flow in place of that heavy feeling you have after a big meal that requires more energy to digest.

By having regular smaller meals every 2 - 3 hours is like keeping logs on the fire, the body keeps burning the fat and provides energy. By the way, a small meal can be described as a side plate portion size.

## **5. Pro lean = Protein**

Include a lean protein source with every meal. Options include chicken, fish and lean red meat.

These better choices provide a low fat and lean option of eating.

After exercise the body is in a catabolic state (the breakdown of muscle tissue). By taking 15 grams of protein, within 30 minutes of intense exercise, helps the body to recover faster and aids damaged muscle tissue. The easiest and best way after exercising or competing is to take a shake with a ratio of 80% protein to 20% carbs.

## **6. Hollywood**

Next time you're at the supermarket checkout, grab one of those magazines that most likely will have either Brad Pitt or Britney Spears on the cover. These magazines, like the fashion and fitness ones, all portray a false image of how one should look and reveals garbage about how great Oprah's new diet works. Pick it up next month and then see how she looks- 3 sizes bigger! Diets and pills don't work.

We hear of the success stories, but the real truth is hidden in a dark corner.

These Hollywood diets are quick fix, temporary solutions. Call me old fashioned, but there's no better way or feeling to working damn hard for something worth getting.

**You should assess yourself on the effort you gave and took to reach your goal,  
rather than the goal itself.**

For example, If it's a sporting goal, that means adhering to the performance essentials I refer to in my system 6 program: Mindset, nutrition, movement, strength, game fundamentals and recovery. If it's losing some inches around the waist, it's adhering to eating a balanced 6 small meals per day, exercising regularly and living a healthier lifestyle.

### **Getting this off my chest**

One last thing and I'm probably going off the subject a little here, but what about these quick fix exercise gadgets you see on tel-sell and the like?

I'm talking about the advertisements with a gorgeous girl in a bikini or a guy looking like Gladiator sitting on the couch holding a glass of wine, watching TV, wired to his teeth with electro-loads 'working out'.

They have the mordacity to call this exercising without effort. This makes me throw up.

I often wonder what those who are less fortunate and in wheel chairs think when they see this.

Let me say this: movement is a gift from god above, it can be taken away within the blink of an eyelid, a bus could hit you this afternoon!

Movement and exercise are an appreciation of what we have been given. It's a mind-body thing, not a credit card and couch thing.

Take the stairs instead of the lift, walk to the shops instead of taking the car, in other words:

Become a human doing instead of a human being.