

# 13 Steps to Better Health

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**T**HE WEEKEND has arrived. You want to go for a hike, bike or paddle, but the voice in your head keeps telling you that you're tired. Relaxing would feel much better. You might have the energy to put on hiking shoes or pick up your bike, but you just can't seem to pick up the pace

Is something wrong?

Perhaps you just aren't taking proper care of yourself. Here are some signs: fatigue, lack of energy during training or in races, sore and achy muscles and joints for prolonged periods, weight gain, slow recovery after exercise, poor performance, headaches, recurrent colds and indigestion.

Those who compete in outdoor activities tend to focus on what they eat on or around race day. Whether you're racing, or just recreating, the most important nutritional and lifestyle habits you follow must begin weeks, months, even years before the event.

Many people follow nutritional bits and pieces they glean from magazines and newspapers. But it's hard to get a full picture from information fragments. So, before you jump into a diet plan, buy expensive supplements, or follow the latest exercise or nutritional fad, consider the following top nutritional and lifestyle pointers. They're sure to boost performance and allow you to enjoy rugged outdoor experiences for years. You may be surprised at how good you feel.



## 1. Get more sleep

Since the advent of the light bulb, North Americans sleep about 1.5 fewer hours than our great-grand-

parents did. Contrary to popular belief, most people do not function well

on six to seven hours of sleep. The average person requires about eight hours every night to perform at peak levels during the day. For children and teenagers this number becomes 10+ hours of sleep. Sleep is a basic drive, like appetite and thirst. If your sleep drive isn't fulfilled, others take over to compensate, such as a craving for carbohydrates. Sleep is a place to re-energize yourself. If you aren't getting enough sleep to obtain energy, your body may hold on to more body fat as a way of getting the energy it needs.

## 2. Get rid of sugar and refined Carbohydrates

The average North American consumes close to 60 kg of sugar each year. Estimates suggest that North Americans consume 15-25 percent of their daily calories as fructose sweeteners – the kind of refined sugar found in candy, cereal and off-the-shelf snack food. A sugar fix will send your blood sugar soaring fast, but will bring it down faster. The result: a daily roller coaster ride of energy ups and downs. Chronic consumption of these refined sugars can lead to Type 2 Diabetes, the form usually associated with grandparents. Unfortunately, today kids and teens make up the largest and fastest sub-population developing Type 2 Diabetes.



## 3. Eat slow-release carbohydrates

Pasta isn't the only type of slow-release carbohydrate. This group also includes beans, peas, lentils, rice, brown rice, millet, rye, oats, and any other whole grain, as well as squash and sweet potatoes.

These carbohydrates will slowly raise and maintain your blood sugar level, helping you maintain energy over a longer period of time. Take this test.... Tomorrow get up and have a bowl of your favorite sugar-enriched cereal with white toast and jam. The next day have a bowl of hot oats (not instant), hot brown rice or millet cereal with yogurt, and a few raisins as well as some favorite seeds or nuts. Now compare how you feel over the course of the morning on both days. The slow-release carbohydrates will make you feel better and give more energy.

## 4. Eat a nourishing breakfast

A nourishing breakfast should include a slow-release carbohydrate, high-quality protein, and a vegetable. If steamed fish with brown rice and steamed broccoli is not for you, then try whole grain toast (the kind that would bruise your toe if you dropped it), with soft-boiled eggs, and sliced tomatoes. Homemade soups and stews prepared in a slow-cooker work well. Does this suggestion push your gag response? Then start with hot cereal or make your own musli-cereal. If you need to sweeten it, use dried fruit, maple syrup or honey. The key is controlling the sugar. Other sources of protein include seed and nut-butters (e.g. organic peanut or almond butter). People who consistently choose a nourishing breakfast make better quality food choices later in the day,



and generally feel they have more energy. They also tend to be less obese.

### 5. Time your meals consistently

People who eat at consistent times tend to have more energy and maintain a better weight. Skipping meals often leads to poorer food choices and poorer health over the long term. If you skip breakfast and lunch, by 3 p.m. your brain will not be thinking of hummus and veggies. This is where the high-calorie, nutrient-poor, food choices tend to take over. If you avoid late evening snacks, but eat at consistent times, you'll sleep better and help your body get rid of excess fat.



### 6. Eat high quality, lean protein with most meals

Some examples include free-range or organic meats and eggs, fish, nuts/seeds, tofu, yogurt and low-fat cheeses. Protein with meals helps to maintain consistent blood sugar levels and allows access to your body fat stores more easily. The easiest way to obtain adequate levels of protein is to include one serving (about the size of the palm of your hand) of a protein-rich food at most meals or snacks.

### 7. Eat high quality fats and oils

Quality not quantity is the rule. If you chose to buy organic at all, then this is the most important area. Toxins and chemical residues accumulate in fat in both plants and animals. Eat foods that contain fats and oils in their natural unaltered state (e.g. avocado, nuts, seeds, fish, olives, and organic dairy products). Use extra virgin, first pressed olive oil as your main bottled vegetable oil for salad dressings. For variety and added fat-soluble nutrients and essential fatty acids, combine it with cold-pressed flax oil. These fresh, unadulterated oils are critical for healthy immune function and healthy skin, nails and hair. They also help protect against cardiovascular disease and inflammation.

### 8. Eat lots of fruit and vegetables

Especially, eat fruits and vegetables with lots of color. Fruit and veggies with vivid or darker colours are packed with nourishing minerals, nutrients, fibre, and lots of other critical elements that boost performance. So choose olive-green, extra virgin olive oil instead of vegetable oil; choose brown rice instead of white rice; choose red wine instead of white. You can even choose dark chocolate instead of white. The rule here is moderation, so live a little.

### 9. Eat a variety of foods from all food groups

Open yourself up to a variety of vegetables. Try different grains like brown rice, millet, or quinoa. Sample a multitude of beans, peas and lentils. Eat fish, seafood, free-range meat and fowl. Eating a broader variety of foods ensures you will receive a broader range of nourishment.



Did you know that the average North American eats less than 1.2 servings of green vegetables per week and that the most commonly consumed vegetable is the potato (as French fries)?

### 10. Drink pure water

Many people walk around in a semi-dehydrated state. This leads to faster fatigue and poorer overall performance. Proper hydration increases metabolic efficiency, which increases fat burning, making it easier to lose weight. You should drink six to eight glasses (1.5-2 liters) of water daily. If you tend to consume lots of fresh homemade soups and salads then you obviously do not need as much water. Try this out. The next time you're having a mid-morning or mid-afternoon "low," instead of reaching for a cup of coffee or a donut, treat yourself to water. You may just be thirsty.



### 11. Minimize caffeinated beverages

If coffee were invented today, probably governments would make it

illegal because of its addictive qualities. While some evidence indicates that caffeine in small amounts may improve athletic performance, my clinical experience suggests that it usually *impairs* performance. Most caffeine consumers require more and more to provide the same effect; usually they end up on a daily blood sugar rollercoaster. Side effects include irritability, fatigue, muscle tightness, a slow morning metabolism, headache, and more.

### 12. Take a good quality multi-vitamin

Most researchers agree that current agricultural practices often leave our soils lacking trace minerals and other nutrients that are critical for a healthy immune system and all body functions. Take a multi-vitamin to insure that you're covering all bases while you're eating a healthy diet. Eating junk food and popping a daily vitamin will not protect you against the ill effects of a poor diet.



### 13. Choose food, not fortification

Fortification is an attempt by the food industry to replace some vital substances that they have removed in the processing and packaging. The food value of a fortified cereal pales in comparison to a bowl of hot oats, rice, or millet. As a general rule, if something has been fortified, it can be removed from the category of food.

If you follow the advice above, have a clean bill medically, but continue experiencing difficulties, consult a nutritionally-oriented health care practitioner.

Remember... changes don't happen in a day. Healthy habits take a lifetime to form and maintain. In other words, don't expect weight loss or sudden energy boost. It may take a month or more before you begin feeling much better.

But persevere. Energy and better health are waiting for you.

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