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**G**lycogen. It's not a very pretty word, but if you're serious about exercise, you should become familiar with it. So let's get the chemistry lesson out of the way: Glycogen is ener-

# Energy Recharge

Replenish your body's natural fuel reserves through proper nutrition.  
By Anthony Head

gy that is stored in your muscles in the form of carbohydrates. When you exercise, you deplete these reserves and muscles get tired and weak. In essence, glycogen is the nutritional currency that pays the exercise bills.

After a workout—whether it's a four-mile jog, a kickboxing class, 40 laps in the pool, or 400 crunches—you've spent part of your glycogen allowance. And you're gonna miss it when it's gone. That's why it's essential to take care of nutritional needs after exercising. Even if you don't feel hungry, your muscles are craving glycogen and need to be fed.

When is the best time to refuel? "Within a couple of hours of exercising, you should put something into your body to help replenish the energy you expended," says Nancy Clark, director of nutrition services at SportsMedicine Associates, a Boston-area sports injuries clinic. Clark, also the author of *Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook*, says for the casual exerciser, recovery occurs fairly easily, but it's still a good idea to give the body some assistance.

"Cereal with milk, yogurt and a banana, a turkey sandwich with some orange juice—these are all good choices," says Clark. They provide a healthy balance of carbohydrates and protein, an essential mix for muscle recuperation. But she's quick to point out that there are no magic foods to instantly refresh the body, nor are there any diets that miraculously help either, and that includes the current wave of high-protein/low-carbohydrate diets, which actually deplete the body's energy reserves. Complex carbohydrates are very





important for the body's rejuvenation and need to be included in a fitness program. The amount, however, depends on how hard you exercise.

"The question to ask is, did you totally exhaust yourself?" says Clark. "If so, then a nice mix of carbs and protein will assist in the recovery process."

Even as you read this, sports scientists are working around the clock to figure out just what is the "nice mix," the ultimate formula, the über recipe, the right ratio of carbs to protein for the post-workout meal.

Chances are their answer won't be a panacea though, because we all have different nutritional needs based on weight, age, sex, and activity levels—one size does not fit all.

We do know that lean protein is best for repairing muscle tissue that's been torn down by weight training. But there's no need to

and protein; lean chicken and turkey, egg whites, and most soy products provide high-quality protein as well. But don't be afraid of energy bars and protein shakes. Even the Mayo Clinic says these items are acceptable substitutes on occasion, citing that there is no difference in performance whether carbohydrates are eaten or drunk.

However, because timing is everything in post-workout nutrition, some fitness enthusiasts swear by easily digestible carbohydrate/protein-based drinks. After endurance exercise and strength training, the body is ready for a deposit in the glycogen account. This golden period, when the muscles absorb carbohydrates and utilize protein with optimum efficiency, is highest imme-



## Food is the yin to the exercise yang; the two work in beautiful harmony.

overdo it; unless you're an elite athlete training for six hours each day, there's little chance that you're not getting enough protein in your diet.

For endurance exercise, such as running, swimming, and aerobic classes, complex carbohydrates need to be replaced. Again, you don't need to scarf down a huge bowl of pasta with breadsticks and a baked potato, but carbs are the body's fuel, and a small dose of them will feed your muscles while keeping your energy and blood sugar levels maintained throughout the day.

Experts say that real food is best for overall nutrition. Whole grains, beans, lentils, and hummus are all excellent sources of carbohydrates

diately after exercise and lasts throughout the next two hours. The most apparent result of a carb and protein blast is an energy boost, but eventually, you'll begin to see more muscle mass develop. Research also suggests that athletes supplement their diets with vitamins C and E. The antioxidants help repair tissues broken down by strain and inactivate free radicals stirred up by extra oxygen intake.

At the very least, after working out you should restore lost fluids—during an hour workout you can sweat out several liters. In addition to drinking plenty of water and electrolyte-enhanced sports drinks (to assist in muscular function) during exercise, continue to hydrate afterward as well to bring fluid levels

back to normal—experts suggest one to two liters consumed slowly post-workout.

As athletic director of the Vail Athletic Club and Spa in Colorado, Evin Paige Garretson says to shun caffeine for awhile afterward. "You're better off not having caffeine because all it provides is a false rush that your body will have to rebound from later," she says. Even though you may feel like you need that boost after a tiring workout, caffeine is a mild diuretic and may contribute to dehydration.

Perhaps the only exception to the immediacy rule of eating would be in the case of yoga. At Yogaville, a holistic health center and spa located in the picturesque James River Valley near Charlottesville, Virginia, meals are available throughout the day, but guests are encouraged to wait awhile

after classes before digging into fresh fruit, miso soup, baked brown tofu, and other nutritious foods.

Dr. Sandra McLanahan, a consultant to Yogaville, says that it's best to abstain after yoga to help maintain its benefits. "During yoga there is a circulatory massage; in other words, we move the blood around to various parts of the body," says McLanahan. "After about 15 minutes, the blood begins to recirculate on its own, so that's the best time to feed the muscles."

The key to maintaining a fitness program is balance, and food is the yin to the exercise yang. The two work in beautiful harmony with one another to create the kind of well-being we all crave. Which means that your workout doesn't end with the last sit-up.