

We have all heard that iron is important, but what exactly is iron and what does it do in our body? Iron is a very important element that is used in our body to carry oxygen through the blood and transfer oxygen into the muscle cells. Also, iron is integral in creating ATP, which is the body's only source of usable energy. Without ATP the body cannot function and we cannot exercise. And without iron, we cannot sufficiently create APT. Since iron helps carry oxygen through our blood, if we don't have enough and our blood starts pumping while we exercise, we can get dizzy and in some cases we can faint. Therefore it is important to get enough iron in your diet to reach your maximum performance.

When we have low levels of iron in our body it can lead to iron deficiency with symptoms of fatigue and reduced endurance. Low levels of iron can also lead to decreased VO2 max, lower performance, and decreased work capacity. Not enough iron can also make you lightheaded, dizzy, bruise easily, and tire easily. Distance runners are especially vulnerable to decreased iron levels. No matter what kind of exercise you do, iron is important you're your endurance and quality of your workout.

An easy way to incorporate more iron into your diet is to eat red meat. Lesser known foods that contain high levels of iron are leafy green vegetables, legumes, tofu, chickpeas, and fortified breads and cereals. There are also many iron supplements on the market in both pill and liquid form. If you are suspicious that your iron is low, have your doctor do a blood test to test you for anemia. If you are anemic, it will be even more important to get iron into your diet so you can exercise normally. Endurance athletes depend on oxygen being delivered to working muscles efficiently, so make sure you are consuming enough iron for your body to perform at its maximum potential.

Protein is a very important substance in our body and is extremely important for muscle building and repair. In fact, protein is made up of amino acids which are the building blocks of life. Almost every cell in our body has protein in it, so it is important to get enough in your diet. Without protein we cannot have cell growth, development, and repair. Therefore it makes sense that people who exercise frequently will need a lot of protein in their diet because they are constantly building and repairing muscles in their body. But how much protein is enough?

Athletes who restrict their diets can end up using protein for fuel instead of cell building and repair, so it's important for them to get even more protein in their diets to counteract this. The recommended amount is .55g/lb for endurance athletes and .75g/lb for strength athletes. To get this much protein, you need to consume high quality protein that contains all the essential amino acids. Some examples of high quality proteins are milk products, eggs, lean beef, poultry, all other meats and soy protein.

Another good idea is to spread your protein throughout the day. Instead of eating a lot of protein with your dinner meal, try to include protein in breakfast and lunch as well. A good rule of thumb is to eat about twenty grams of protein every three to four hours. If you include a little bit of protein with every snack and meal you can easily reach your daily limit without the need for additional supplements. If you are not getting enough protein, especially if you are a vegetarian or vegan, then it would be appropriate to add protein supplements into your diet. Remember, too much protein in your diet will end up being stored as fat so watch how much you are taking in.

If you are wondering when you should time your protein consumption relative to your workouts, there isn't a huge difference between consuming it before or afterwards. Whether you consume protein 45 minutes prior to your workout or immediately afterwards is your choice. Either way, it is still going to help with protein synthesis and glycogen replenishment in your body. Remember, if you are going to workout it is important that you get enough protein in your diet so you can build muscle without risk of losing what you are working so hard to create.

Eight glasses a day is generally thought of as an easy rule of thumb to make sure you are getting enough water into your diet each day. Water is extremely important to the functioning of our bodies. In fact, about 70 percent of our bodies are made up of water. But is eight ounces eight times a day really enough? And does that rule hold true for everyone? Not necessarily.

Everything in our body depends on water to function. Water carries nutrients to your cells, flushes out toxins from your vital organs, and keeps areas of your body moist. When we don't consume enough water it can lead to dehydration which has many negative consequences. Dehydration can lead to headaches, dizziness, fatigue, and in extreme cases can result in death. We lose water every day through basic actions such as breathing, urine, and perspiration. Therefore, when we exercise we lose a lot of water through our sweat. If you feel thirsty, chances are you are already dehydrated.

So how much water is enough? The Institute of Medicine has ruled that men should drink about 13 cups of total beverages per day and women should consume about 9 cups. These beverages do not have to be pure water, but they must contain water. Keep in mind that sodas can dehydrate your body, so if you drink a lot of soda it is important to supplement that with even more water. A good rule of thumb is for every can of soda you drink, have an extra glass of water to counteract it.

Other factors that influence water loss are your environment, the climate, illness or health conditions, and pregnancy and breast-feeding. Warm climates and high elevation can cause you to dehydrate faster, so upping your intake of water is important. Also, when you are sick, pregnant, or breastfeeding you may need to adjust your water consumption accordingly. Staying well hydrated is an important element for your overall health so make sure you are getting enough!