Dear Alice,
I have read (especially in Muscle and Fitness magazine) that it is advisable to eat a high carb snack within 15 to 30 minutes after lifting because your muscles are like sponges then ? they absorb glycogen more quickly, thus replenishing your glycogen supply leading to faster recuperation. Is this true?

Muscle mania

Answer

Dear Muscle mania,

Good work for recognizing that how you fuel your body is just as important as the weights lifted, laps run, or miles walked. Glycogen is a carbohydrate stored in the muscles and liver and is vital for sustaining physical activity over long periods of time. When levels of glycogen are low, you can feel sluggish, weak and tired. During exercise, muscle glycogen is used as a source of energy for the specific muscle in which it is stored. The rate at which muscle glycogen is depleted is dependent upon the type of exercise (higher intensity workouts depleting glycogen stores faster than lower intensity sessions) and the frequency of workouts. Consuming complex carbohydrates before and after your workouts will increase the amount of glycogen stored, enhancing future workouts. It may also be beneficial to add some protein to your post-workout snack, as emerging evidence suggests that protein and carbohydrates combined may actually help with glycogen replacement.

A snack after a workout will provide some of the carbohydrate necessary for glycogen replenishment. Different people may have different preferences on what is satisfying. What kind of food or beverage will your body tolerate after a workout? Do you want a solid snack, a protein smoothie, or a couple pieces of fruit? Would you prefer a sports drink with electrolytes? Whatever your choice, it is always good idea to replace the energy you've expended with a healthful snack while also maintaining a balanced diet throughout the day.

It may be helpful for you to spend some time with a registered dietician to determine your specific needs. You can also talk to a personal trainer to help you understand your entire workout from warm-up to recovery. Many university and commercial fitness centers offer personal training services with their memberships.

Recuperation of muscle fibers after an intense workout goes beyond replenishing glycogen stores. In addition to proper nutrition, a resting period in between workouts helps decrease the
risk of injuries. Good luck with your workout regimen and remember to keep fueling your body for work, rest, play, and everything in between.

Alice!
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Resources

Columbia Health Nutrition Services (Morningside) [11]
Student Health Service Nutrition Services (CUMC) [12]
Dodge Fitness Center (Morningside) [13]
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