

Nutrition can be important factor in athletic success

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When tuning into the Summer Olympics this month, it's clear that each Olympian has worked hard to get Rio. However, according to a registered dietitian at Baylor College of Medicine, that hard work is not limited to the track, pool or stadium, but also translates to the kitchen.

"An athlete's diet is important because [food](#) is the fuel athletes use to perform," said Roberta Anding, registered dietitian and sports dietitian with Baylor College of Medicine.

"Athletes' diets vary by sport and in part by body composition," said Anding. "A 400 meter runner would have a different [body composition](#) and different needs than a distance runner. These needs however, are not static. The nutritional requirements change with training load."

Anding said that those athletes who train two or more times per day require more calories than they would during the offseason. One thing remains the same though: athlete diets should consist of quality food including lean proteins, whole grains, fruit and vegetables.

Sometimes athletes with very high calorie needs cannot meet those needs with only fruits and vegetables, Anding said, which is where high-calorie foods that provide valuable energy such as nuts, trail mix, nut butters and even 100 percent juice come in. These provide calorie density, but not excessive volume, which can be a barrier in meeting the calorie needs.

Surprisingly, foods that non-athletes need to limit can sometimes be an

important part of training and recovery in athletes. For example, sugar is a rapidly digested source of carbohydrates and serves a purpose for many [athletes](#). It can be found in sports drinks, gels and other sports foods.

"It's hard to say that an athlete should never eat a particular food. Although not part of a foundational diet, saying 'never' to a particular food may discount their preferences as well as stigmatize a food that they have had success with for years," said Anding.

Under-fueling during training and competition can be a problem and includes signs such as weight loss, fatigue and poor performance. Specifically in [female athletes](#), this can lead to a condition called amenorrhea, or the absence of a menstrual cycle.

"The lack of normal menstrual function is a marker of low energy availability," said Anding.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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