

You, too, can eat like an Olympian

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(HealthDay)—While you watch the Winter Olympics from the comfort of your couch in the coming weeks, pay heed to what helped the athletes reach peak physical condition.

"Olympians can teach us a lot about how to eat for better health and performance," said Kaley Mialki, a dietitian with the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

"Fueling and hydrating properly are very important to help us perform our best, whether we are Olympians or average exercisers," she said in a university news release.

A major difference between [elite athletes](#) and people in the general population is the number of calories athletes need to consume.

"While we may not need the same amount of food as Olympians, like Olympians, we can benefit from high-quality protein, low-fat dairy, fruits, vegetables and whole grains," Mialki said.

"Olympic athletes typically have much higher activity levels than the rest of the population, which greatly impact their calorie needs," she said.

"Like athletes, calorie needs for healthy adults depend on age, height, weight, sex and activity level," Mialki noted. "Most women need between 1,600 to 2,400 calories, and men need between 2,000 to 3,000 calories."

But in other areas, nutrition recommendations for elite athletes and recreational athletes are similar. For example, an elite athlete requires only slightly more protein per pound of body weight than a recreational athlete.

"Some people believe eating extra protein helps build muscle. While protein is an important nutrient for athletes, exercise and training are responsible for building muscle size and strength, not eating [excess protein](#)," Mialki said.

She said some people use powders or supplements for their [protein intake](#), but there's no evidence that this is better than getting protein from a healthy diet.

"When we are able, it's best to get all of our nutrients from whole food sources, including protein," Mialki said.

"There are many foods with high-quality protein, such as lean meat and poultry, fish, eggs, low-fat dairy foods, beans, tofu, seeds, nuts and nut butters," she said.

More information: The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics has more on [exercise and nutrition](#).

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