



YOUR NUTRITION GAME PLAN



Struggling to Maintain Weight



It's a common situation. You work hard during the off-season to put on lean mass, only to see it slip away during the season. You can probably think of many reasons for the weight loss - like "too busy to eat" or "not hungry." No matter what your reasons are, losing weight boils down to one thing: you are consuming fewer calories than you burn.

There are no easy ways to get the calories you need. In fact, it is the hardest part of the season for many athletes. But if you are dedicated to it, and if you make eating as much of a commitment as any other part of your training, you can hang on to that hard-earned weight.

Three basic habits will help you keep your weight up:

- Eat at least five times a day.
- Eat high calorie foods.
- Get enough sleep.

That short list makes it look easy, but you know it's not. Hectic schedules and other situations get in your way of following through with these habits. Following are common road blocks to eating enough. Once you've identified the situations that get in your way, figure out how to conquer the problems. Some solutions are suggested here. You may find others.

Situation: It's expensive to buy enough food

Solution: It costs money to eat a high calorie diet, no doubt about it. If money is a big problem, you

may have to sacrifice convenience. For example it's cheaper to blend your own shake than to buy a liquid supplement and a peanut butter sandwich costs a fraction of a sport bar. It can also be cheaper to eat at home than to eat out.

Situation: Don't like to cook

Solution: If you hate to cook, don't. There are plenty of ways to get the calories in without measuring, mixing or major clean up. No-muss, no-fuss options are cold cereal with milk, microwave meals/snacks, ice cream shakes, sandwiches or canned fruits, main dishes and soups.

Situation: No food around when I need to eat.

Solution: The only way you'll be able to eat five or more times a day is to keep food handy all the time. Stock your cupboards, locker, bag and glove box with foods that won't spoil, break or melt. Ideas are nuts, dried fruit, canned or bottled beverages, bars, and boxed crackers.

Situation: Don't like to eat breakfast

Solution: Not being hungry is a common reason athletes give for skipping breakfast. If you aren't hungry for traditional breakfast fare, eat or drink whatever sounds good to you. Calories are the priority, and it doesn't matter if they come from cold burritos or hot pancakes.

If it's the full feeling that you don't like, pass on the solids and try drinking juice or breakfast

drinks. Liquids tend to empty from your stomach faster than solid foods. It might take some time to get used to eating first thing when you get up. Increase the amount gradually.

Besides not being hungry, not having time for breakfast is a common problem. Sparing a few minutes for breakfast can be difficult, but here's something that might convince you to set the alarm a few minutes earlier.

Sleep experts say you need nine hours of sleep a night. Nine hours from a 24-hour day leaves you 15 waking hours to eat five times. That translates to eating every three hours. If you wait several hours after waking to eat, you would have to eat about every two hours to get what you need - a deal-breaker for most busy athletes.

Situation: No time to eat when balancing classes, working, studying, training and competing

Solution: No time to eat really means you don't have food readily available. If you have a non-stop day ahead of you, pack a big bag of foods for the day that don't need to be refrigerated. Eating on the run takes resourcefulness, but isn't impossible.

Situation: Not hungry; I feel nauseous after I eat.

Solution: One of the causes of no appetite and nausea is being dehydrated. Make sure you stay hydrated by drinking enough fluids to replace sweat losses. Weigh before and after practice to see how much water you lose from sweating. For each pound of sweat loss, you need to drink at least 1 pint (16 ounces) of fluid.

Maybe you've been told to drink a lot of water to stay hydrated. It's great advice; but other beverages also provide the water you need. Drinking a variety of calorie-containing beverages gives you the water AND the extra calories you need to maintain your weight. Did you know that milk and juice are about 89% water?

Situation: I'm eating all I can, but it's still not enough

Solution: One way to boost calories without eating more food is to add calories to foods and beverages you already consume. For example, fat adds calories to foods without adding bulk. Check to see if the foods you eat are low fat or fat free. If so, replacing them with foods that have fat can help increase your calorie intake.

Another tip to increase your calorie intake is eating several different foods at a meal or snack. Research shows that individuals will eat more if a variety of foods are set before them. For example, you'll likely eat more total calories if you have three things at a meal instead of just one thing.

And avoid having the same food over and over again. You'll get "taste fatigue", a fancy term to mean you'll get bored with it. You may LOVE pizza, but research shows that if you had to eat it every day, you would eat less and less of it.

So much for trying to increase your input; how about decreasing your output. If you are a calorie-burning machine, one way to downshift is to make sure you get enough sleep. You burn fewer calories during sleep than any other time of day.

Situation: I have no idea why I lose weight

Solution: One way to hone in on what you could change is to write down what you eat and drink, and how much you sleep for three days. Check it to make sure you are eating frequently, eating high calorie foods, and getting enough sleep.

Once you've figured out what gets in your way of eating and sleeping enough, determine what solutions will work for you. Most importantly, follow-through with the changes. Persistence is a key to successfully maintaining weight.

