

EAT 2 COMPETE



Nutrition 4 the Off-Season

The long school year is over and summer is finally here! The off-season is a time for relaxing and taking a break both physically and mentally from the stress of the season. It is really important that you take advantage of this time, to give your body a chance to be re-charged for the beginning of next season. Nutrition plays a part here too, and this information aims to outline how you can get the most out of what you eat in order to stay in good shape.

A break is a must

Taking a few weeks off to let the body and mind rest and rejuvenate should be the summer's first priority. The best nutritional advice during this time is to enjoy time to eat well, being mindful not to use it as a chance to 'pig out'. Your energy expenditure (that is, the

amount of calories you use up) will probably be less now that your intense training and matches are over, so you will need less energy (calories) going in. The best way to do this is to reduce the amount of snacking and trimming down the size of your main meals. Remember that many take-away foods are high in fat and calories so control your intake.

Next up: tackle an off-season goal

A couple of weeks of rest and relaxation are just what the doctor ordered. It is likely however that after this you will get back into some form of training to prepare you for the start of next season. You may have been set some goals that might include increasing muscle mass, reducing body fat, maintaining overall aerobic fitness and improving speed.



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Goal: Increasing muscle mass

Everyone wants results quickly. What you need to remember is that muscle development takes time and a big increase in weight on the scales in the off-season is more likely to be fat weight gain when training volumes are lower. To gain muscle, you do need more calories to allow them to grow and this means you need to be smart about what you eat to prevent unnecessary fat gain while still providing enough calories for muscle growth.

Be realistic - weight gain of a couple of kilos is the most you should be aiming for over the summer period.

Tips for gaining body weight

- Eat more often if you can't eat a lot. Fit snacks in between breakfast, lunch, dinner and at bed time (check out the IRFU Snack List fact sheet)
- Increase the nutrition value of foods by:
 - Adding peanut butter, honey or jam to breads or toast
 - Using yogurt and honey in smoothies (check out the IRFU Smoothie fact sheet)
 - Adding skimmed milk powder (eg Marvel) to milk drinks
- Make sure you are well fuelled up before doing any exercise - carbohydrates are the key foods you need to get the best quality out of your session
- Remember to refuel after exercise - keep some tasty snacks in your kit bag
- Drink plenty of fluids - include milk, juices, milkshakes and smoothies as well as water



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Goal: Trimming body fat

The off-season is a good opportunity to trim body fat and if this is a priority for you, then it might mean that you will lose some overall body weight. This is ok, as losing fat while maintaining muscle mass will mean you should maintain your strength and power. Again, you need to be realistic about how much weight should be lost over the summer months. If you lose too much, then the chances are that you will have lost muscle mass, which defeats the purpose. You should lose no more than ½ a kilo of weight a week.

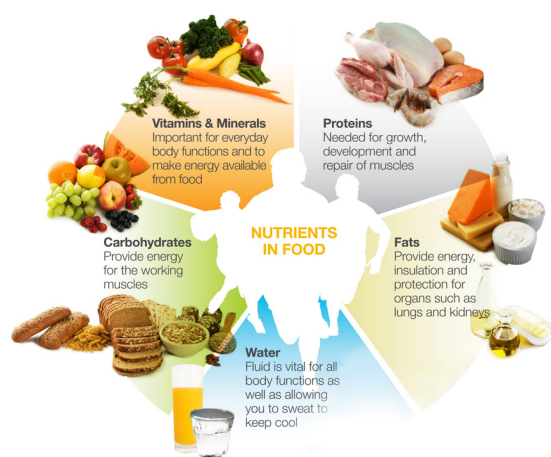
Tips for losing body fat

- Reduce the portion of meal sizes as well as snacks. Make sure you include fruit on your snack list
- Only eat till you are full - try not to overeat
- Keep fat intake low; be sparing with butter, margarine, oil in cooking, fat on meat, and fried foods
- Be careful of hidden fats in processed foods like biscuits, cakes, doughnuts, pastries, processed meats, salami, and takeaways
- Increase the amount of vegetables or salad in your meals
- Don't cut out particular foods or food groups - you need regular intake of carbohydrate and protein foods
- Drink plenty of water during the day - keep sweet drinks to a minimum

Sports supplements

You should not be taking any sports supplements. You will get all the nutrients (that is, carbohydrate, protein, fat, vitamins and minerals) from eating a wide variety of different foods. Sports supplements are expensive and there is no evidence that they give any advantages over whole foods.

Look at this circle of foods and make sure you are eating foods from all the groups



Have a look at the fact sheets on the Irish Rugby website www.irishrugby.ie/eat2compete to get some practical ideas about good eating and drinking for rugby.

So, enjoy the summer and eat and drink well to be super-charged and ready for the season ahead!

