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Effects of Nutrition on Swimming: Literature Review

The swimming community places a great deal of importance upon getting a competitive edge and performing at top levels. Some health experts, coaches, parents, and swimmers maintain that proper nutrition provides the ticket to this edge. Swimmers often develop an interest in nutrition for their sport because “good eating habits promote health, overall wellness, and may even optimize swimming performance” (Castle). Athletes and coaches often relentlessly chase after this optimization of performance, even if it requires increased attention to out of the pool habits; in this case, it affects the at-the-table habits. Coaches, parents, and swimmers themselves may work very hard to help the swimmers rise to the top, and monitoring the athletes’ food and drink intake to ensure maximum possible success presents no exception.

More specifically than day to day nutrition, swimmers must focus on their food choices for meet day. Swim meets last for long amounts of time and demand a great deal of the body. Sometimes lasting up to eight hours, meets require athletes to develop appropriate strategies for planning when and what they eat, no easy task. Because swimmers often find it tricky to keep energy levels up during such a long day, they should “fuel consistently throughout the event” (Corbin 65). Frequent calorie intake in small portions enables swimmers to stay fueled without feeling full and sluggish. This method of eating ensures that the athlete never becomes too hungry and that his body stays prepared to perform. After one of these highly grueling meets, proper recovery helps ensure continued success. Optimal recovery requires proper calorie consumption following physical activity regardless of whether or not the athlete does not feel noticeably hungry. There exists a particular window during which recovery nutrition proves most effective. Experts have suggested that athletes should “take in calories within 45 minutes of receiving your medal” or concluding physical activity (Corbin 65). This is the ideal time frame because during this period, the body’s muscles are working to replace their power supply. After strenuous activity, eating and drinking might not seem particularly appetizing, but refueling the body with protein and carbohydrates plays a vital role in allowing adequately recovery of these muscles.

Nutrition experts suggest that consuming small, high carbohydrate snacks prior to races can provide quick energy needed for the short-lived extreme energy exertion associated with swim races. Taking in calories in the right amounts, from the right sources, and at the right times can be crucial to getting adequately amped for a big race. Despite previous claims that athletes should not eat shortly before or during exercise, recently studies have shown that food can in fact be effectively digested during exercise and should be eaten to beneficially boost blood sugar (Clark 68). Experts claim that taking in “small bursts of nutrition” provide the ideal fueling for races (Leigh). These small amounts of food suggested allow the body to easily digest the food, avoiding unnecessary hindrance of performance. Small but frequent portions seem to function as the most effective method to stay fueled during a long meet without crippling the digestive process.

Swimmers are often expected to practice or swim another meet the day right after a meet and therefore, need to recover quickly and fully. Studies suggest that milk and chocolate milk can serve as great post-exercise recovery choices. Comprised of primarily of children and teenage athletes, my swim community should aim for nutritional strategies that focus on the bodies of people within this age group. Chocolate milk has the potential to function as an effective nutritional selection because “milk…provides positive nutrition and health benefits for active children and teenagers” and possesses a unique ration of protein and carbohydrates (Reid 431, Sine). Targeting the correct group and appealing to its members because of its sweet taste, chocolate milk provides a promising option for effective recovery. Additionally, the more natural approach that milk takes, in contrast to that of the carefully engineered sports drinks, gels, and bars shows major promise, especially in young athletes (Clark 68).

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