

# WITH NUTRITION, SIMPLE IS BETTER

## Eat for what you're doing next.

By Kim McCullough, M.Sc., YCS



I used to eat a McChicken meal every day for lunch when I was in grade 7 and 8. Not something I'm particularly proud of, but it's the truth. Ever since I stopped that habit cold turkey over 20 years ago, I've been a bit of a "nutrition geek." When I was in high school, I would go to the library and read books on health and fitness all the time – and sports nutrition was one of my favorite topics. And it still is today.

However, the difference between the nutrition information that was widely available 20 years ago in the library and what is available today on the internet is "night and day." It is really easy to get bogged down in the details. Seriously, between all the fad diet ads that creep into our Facebook sidebars and all the celebrity weight loss secrets we're subjected to when we watch TV or search for nutrition information online, it's pretty hard to figure out what is good information and what could hurt us. Don't get me wrong, there is a lot of great information out there, and if you are willing to make the time and effort, you can take your performance on the rink (and in life in general) through the roof with the right focus on nutrition.

But today I want to keep it simple and give you the two best nutrition tips I know:

**1. Eat for what you're doing next.** This makes so much sense, doesn't it? You should always eat the right kind of fuel for what you will be doing next. So, if you get home late from a hockey game, do you really need to eat a huge serving of pasta? Or half a pizza? Of course not. Because all that you're doing next is sleeping. You might have a healthy smoothie with some extra protein to help your muscles recover from the game or a peanut butter and banana sandwich on a healthy bread. But you definitely don't need any fast food or huge meals before going to bed.

The same principle applies with the pre-game meal. You definitely don't want to be eating a fat-filled or sugar-laden meal before hitting the ice. You need energy that's going to last throughout the game, so you need complex carbohydrates, some protein to help keep you full and keep your muscles strong and a

little bit of healthy fat, too. If you want elite level performance out on the ice, you need to put elite level fuel into your body.

This also explains why we always hear that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Although most of us don't have hockey games or training early in the morning, we need healthy fuel to kick-start the day and top up our energy for all the running around we do in our lives. So, we have to eat a healthy breakfast to get us going. A stop at the drive-thru for some pre-packaged breakfast doesn't cut it – especially if it involves a donut, muffin or hash browns. You need to take in healthy proteins, carbohydrates and a little bit of fat to get your day started right. It could be as simple as having a few scrambled eggs with a piece of fruit and an English muffin. You're eating for what you're doing next – which is facing a long day filled with school, work, hockey and everything else life throws at you.

**2. Eat as many “one-ingredient” foods as you can.** This is another golden piece of nutrition advice I heard recently. It's pretty simple: Try to make as many of the foods you eat one-ingredient foods. An apple has one ingredient. Same for chicken, eggs, avocados, oatmeal (as long as it's not from a little package with some strange flavor blast in it), blueberries, water, cucumbers, etc. The shorter the ingredient list for a food, the easier it is for your body to get the energy out of that food so that you can use it out on the ice. How simple is that?

You can of course combine one-ingredient foods in order to make a meal, but you don't want to have pre-packaged, overly processed foods as the main source of fuel in your body. For example, a typical granola bar you find at your grocery store is going to have over 10 ingredients – and some have closer to 20-30 ingredients. That's a lot of ingredients for your body to break down and try to convert to energy. I know that not all granola bars are created equal (some are definitely healthier than others), but it's not the ideal source of fuel for your body.

I hope those simple tips make sense. Like I said above, this is best nutrition advice I know and it is definitely something you should pass on to friends, teammates, players, and fellow parents and coaches who might benefit from the information.