

The Other 95% of Nutrition (AKA – The Evolution of Sports Nutrition)

By Ron Noreman

Bodybuilding has changed tremendously since 1977, when I started on my path of this lifelong obsession. Many of these changes have been positive.

Training schedules evolved into those emphasizing more recuperation between same body part sessions. Advanced routines in the late 1970's and early 1980's often called for each body part to be trained three times a week over a six day per week rotation. Clearly we have found a better way.

Supplementation has evolved. Ask anyone who was training 25 years ago what protein powders were like. The gases produced surely contributed to the thinning of the earth's ozone layer.

There have been major advances in nutrition on many levels. We now know about the post training window for replacing carbohydrates and protein. We have been educated on eating frequent, smaller feedings of protein six or more times a day rather than eating 3 squares a day. The list goes on and on.

What many in the bodybuilding community have lost sight of is "holistic nutrition". This has steadily occurred over the past 20 years. The emphasis has become simply looking a certain way on a certain day as long as your health holds up. When your health fails, you fade away into the sunset.

Back in the day (20-30 years ago) bodybuilders frequented health food stores. We're not talking about stores that simply sell hundreds of supplements but old-fashioned health food stores that sell organic fruits, vegetables, grains, cold-pressed oils, whole grain breads, cereals and so on. It was part of the bodybuilding culture to be concerned about our overall health and well-being. This was an era prior to the establishment of today's huge and specialized sports nutrition industry. Back then, if you wanted to pursue nutrition and supplementation to improve your bodybuilding, it was achieved through the use of general health food, wellness and longevity concepts. There was no large sports supplement industry to hand us products. We had to find applicable concepts in the world of general nutrition and supplementation to help us be better, healthier athletes.

It seemed more of the priority back then to eat brown rice rather than white, organic whole grain breads rather than a bagel from the local deli; fresh fruits rather than a sugar drink when you're running low on energy. Bodybuilders made it a priority to eat vegetables a couple times a day because it was healthy. The knowledge wasn't there, as it is today, where we understand the benefits of phytonutrients, polyphenols and pigments in different fruits and vegetables. We simply knew that oranges have vitamin C, carrots have pro-vitamin A (beta-carotene), and bananas have potassium.

There are certainly exceptions in today's bodybuilding world, but only a small minority eats or understands the importance of a balanced, whole-food based diet. I just read an interview with a well known top level bodybuilder whose diet was something like this:

Breakfast	-	10 egg whites and grits
Mid morning	-	Meal replacement shake
Lunch	-	Chicken breast and white rice
Afternoon	-	Meal replacement shake
Dinner	-	Steak and white rice
Evening	-	Chicken breast and white rice

The publication in which this interview appeared commended this bodybuilder for the well-planned diet plan he followed. Regardless of how he looked the day of his show, his diet is a disaster. No fiber, no vegetables, no fruit, no whole grains and no essential fats. This kind of unbalanced, nutritionally deficient eating plan is far too common in our sport. It also has contributed to the health problems we are seeing in bodybuilding. I believe that proper diet and well-informed supplementation can mitigate some of the health risks inherent in hardcore bodybuilding. Alternatively, the unhealthy things bodybuilders often do to become bodybuilders can be that much more risky if nutritional countermeasures are not considered.

There are great supplements that have been proven to lower cholesterol, others that lower blood sugar and still others that fight inflammation in joints and tendons. Many of today's bodybuilding diets advocated daily servings of red meat, some even more than once a day. Haven't we heard enough bad health news in our sport to not learn how to help ourselves toward a healthier heart.

Generation X and Y bodybuilders (people currently 20-38 years old) appear to have an understanding of 'macro-nutrients'- at least protein and carbohydrates. For instance, it is commonly understood that strength athletes need 1 gram of protein per pound of bodyweight or more. Almost everyone knows to cut carbs when trying to harden up and increase them when trying to add bulk.

Only recently have the value of certain fats been discussed in bodybuilding publications but in practice very few bodybuilders incorporate these essential nutrients into their daily diet. Fatty acid selection can have huge effects on health, longevity, inflammation control and the ability to get ripped to the bone. There is no longer any doubt that the right fats can have medicine-like effects on the body.

How many people in bodybuilding know that nuts should be eaten raw rather than roasted and should be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator. Who among us know that 'ORAC' values are the measure of a foods antioxidant power and why that is important to health and ultimately muscle growth. What about grass-fed beef (it's not the same as organic beef) being one of nature's most anabolic foods. Its low fat, low cholesterol, high in CLA's and high in omega 3's for starters. Speaking of omega 3's, how about the theory that in excess, these fats can slow muscle growth much in the way aspirin can.

Where am I going with all my random ranting of facts? It's simple – bodybuilding nutrition and supplements make up maybe 5% of the world of nutrition science. It seems that bodybuilders get a good part of their nutrition education from the ads of bodybuilding supplement companies. Let me be very clear that this is not an attack on sports nutrition companies. My personal feelings are quite the opposite; many sports nutrition companies sell quality products that make our quest for muscles easier and more productive. But make no mistake; ads are designed to sell you something. They are not designed to provide you with a comprehensive education on any subject. Medical doctors have been bombarded by pharmaceutical company sales tactics. Many of the prescriptions written within a given category are selected by doctors based upon which pharmaceutical company sales rep made the best pitch (not to mention which rep bought the best lunch).

Over that past decade, supplement ads and bodybuilding magazines have educated us well on the properties and relative benefits of micro-filtered whey protein isolate vs. ion-exchanged whey isolate vs. whey protein concentrate. Same for creatine ethyl-ester, creatine monohydrate and creatine phosphate. Everyone is so obsessed with picking the best potion, that they have been distracted from the fundamentals. Even within the world of supplementation, if there are 2000 bodybuilding products, there must be 40,000 products in the health, wellness and longevity categories. Many of these items have crossover properties that can help you get ripped, huge and live longer to enjoy your muscles.

In upcoming issues this column will explore what foods and supplements from the holistic nutrition world can help accomplish our bodybuilding goals and feel better in and out of the gym.

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