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This is What You Should be Eating After Your Workout



After you finish a long run or an intense sweat session, what's the first thing you do? If you're like most people, you're probably thinking about grabbing something to eat or drink.

But before you reach for one of the numerous post-workout supplements and products on the market, head to your kitchen. Some of the best recovery aids can be found in your refrigerator or pantry.

There are many real foods and herbs that can help decrease pain, improve muscle repair, and reduce inflammation, boosting your body's ability to recover from the stress of a training session.

What you eat after you work out, especially in the first half-hour to an hour, can have a major impact on how quickly your body bounces back as well as future performance.

These are my favorite go-to recovery methods after lifting weights and swimming laps.

Here are five foods for boosting your post-workout recovery:

1. Tart cherry juice

Tart cherry juice has become the darling of the fitness world, particularly among endurance athletes. That's because these small bursts of red fruit are full of antioxidants and anti-inflammatory compounds that may help reduce inflammation, relieve pain, and speed up muscle repair. Researchers from Oregon Health & Science University found that drinking tart cherry juice can minimize inflammation and muscle pain following long-distance running.

But endurance athletes aren't the only ones who can benefit. Researchers also found that tart cherries may help facilitate recovery after intense, sprint-type activity like soccer and rugby. Additionally, scientists from Texas A&M University found that supplementing with tart cherries reduced muscle soreness and decreased markers of muscle damage. An added bonus is the delicious sweet and tart flavor—no added sugar needed.

2. Turmeric

You probably recognize turmeric because it gives curry powder its bright yellow color. But this integral spice used in South Asian cooking doesn't just taste good. Thanks to the active ingredient curcumin, which gives turmeric its distinctive color, it's a powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory and can be beneficial post-workout. Researchers from the University of South Carolina found that curcumin may reduce inflammation and decrease post-exercise muscle damage. Japanese scientists also found that curcumin may decrease post-exercise oxidative stress. And be sure to pair turmeric with black pepper, which can increase the bioavailability of curcumin 20-fold.

3. Watermelon

You may think of watermelon as the perfect summer picnic treat, but it's not just a warm weather snack. The fruit can also help you banish achy muscles. Watermelon contains L-citrulline, an amino acid with antioxidant properties, which researchers from Spain found to reduce muscle pain and heart rate. Watermelon is also believed to have anti-inflammatory properties according to traditional Chinese medicine.

4. Blueberries

You know that these little berries are antioxidant powerhouses that are good for your brain, but now you have even more reason to include them in your diet. Researchers from New Zealand found that drinking a blueberry smoothie before and after a strenuous workout improved muscle recovery and reduced oxidative stress. So this special berry can help power up your brain and your biceps. Be sure to throw a handful in your post-workout smoothie!

5. Arnica

Herbs like arnica can also be an important tool in your post-workout recovery, particularly for dealing with the dreaded DOMS—delayed onset muscle soreness. Australian researchers found that applying arnica after intense exercise reduced muscle tenderness. Researchers from Norway found that arnica helped to alleviate muscle soreness after running a marathon. I appreciate the relief that rubbing arnica oil or ointment on sore knees, burning biceps, strained shoulders, or simply a stiff neck can bring.

The next time you finish a workout, don't forget to refuel! The right food can be a powerful tool in your post-workout routine and help you reach your fitness goals while supporting your overall health and reducing inflammation in the body.

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