WHAT WE'RE READING...

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NOTE: Some sentiments contained within "What We're Reading" articles may not strictly conform with Simple Again's nutritional outlook. We read articles containing opposing information all the time and derive our nutritional philosophies from the latest science, the opinions of experts worldwide and our anecdotal experiences in the field. We keep an open mind and a strong affinity for fact-based evidence to help make the world of nutrition "Simple Again" for you.

What to Plant in Your Garden to Boost Performance

Spring has sprung and so has your training. Which gets you thinking, what foods and nutritional supplements should you consume to boost performance and create a healthier you? As you all know, there are a multitude of products and practices out there to boost performance and general health. Why? Outstanding research is constantly breeding new and better practices to improve health and performance. However, it is important to be aware that suppliers are meeting the demands of a large market that can easily be enticed by overpromising supplements and practices, which causes confusion on what is legitimate and beneficial and what is not. I would be lying if I wasn't confused at times myself. Overall I recommend sticking to what we do know will benefit performance and overall health and using whole foods to do the honors. And what better way to consume whole foods than from your own backyard.

The following is a selection of produce (fruit, starchy vegetables and non-starchy vegetables) that can be grown this spring to benefit your performance:

Beets, Blueberries, Broccoli, Cabbage

Carrots, Celery, Cherries, Kale

Lettuce, Oranges, Peas, Peppers

Potatoes, Spinach, Strawberries, Tomatoes

They Contain Exogenous Antioxidants

In the sports nutrition field, we seek foods that can decrease the effects of skeletal muscle damage, an inevitable result of endurance activity. As the intensity and duration of activity increases, skeletal muscle contractions produce increasing amounts of radicals that lead to exercise-induced oxidative stress. What is oxidative stress? During exercise reactive oxygen species (ROS) are produced, which in abundance can cause damage to cell structures, leading to fatigue and decreasing muscle force production. But there's good news: Our bodies have a built-in system to scavenge damaging radicals by utilizing a balance of endogenous (produced by our cells) and exogenous (dietary) antioxidants. The more trained you are, the better adapted your endogenous antioxidant buffer system is, leaving you with the responsibility to consume exogenous antioxidants to balance out the two. Exogenous antioxidants are abundant in the produce list and include vitamin E, vitamin C, carotenoids, flavonoids, alpha lipoic acid, anthocyanins, and trace minerals (selenium, manganese, copper, iron, zinc). These different dietary antioxidants vary in their capacity to combat radicals and vary in location within the cells. This is why it

is recommended to consume a wide variety of fruits and vegetables to ensure a thorough balance of exogenous antioxidants exist within your cells. It is also recommended you consume these antioxidants in the form of food to prevent overconsumption. Overconsumption may impede beneficial exercise adaptations for the production of endogenous antioxidants. And lastly, be aware of your environment. Radical volume can increase in hot temperatures and high altitudes.

They Contain Nitrates

On the list beets, carrots, celery and spinach are high in nitrates. Nitrates have been a hot topic in the sports nutrition field as of late, specifically the potency in beetroot juice. These vegetables make nitrate from nitrogen gas in the earth's soil. When consumed, saliva transforms nitrate into nitrite, which is then delivered to your digestive system for absorption after you swallow. It is then transformed to nitric oxide, supplemental oxygen, and is ready to works its magic! Consuming nitrate rich vegetables can decrease blood pressure, increase your metabolic threshold, increase your VO2 max and improve reaction time during exercise. For a thorough explanation on nitrates, check out my article posted in January.

Consumption Amount

What is the recommended amount of fruit, non-starchy vegetables and starchy vegetables you should eat each day? It depends on factors such as your height, weight, other foods you consume regularly and personal needs based on activity and past medical history. I recommend you contact a registered dietitian to assist you in defining the quantity appropriate for you. However, I will mention that a standing recommendation I give my clients is to consume a variety of non-starchy vegetables as much as they want and whenever they want. The more the merrier. Why? Non-starchy vegetables are low in calorie content (they average 25 calories in 1 cup of raw or 1/2 cup cooked) and are extremely difficult to overeat. You don't hear of someone binging on broccoli. The benefits just can't be beat, my friends.